



The
**GIRL FROM
HIS TOWN**

MARIE VAN VORST

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THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN



THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN

By
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THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN

CHAPTER I

DAN BLAIR

THE fact that much he said, because of his unconscionable slang, was incomprehensible did not take from the charm of his conversation as far as the Duchess of Breakwater was concerned. The brightness of his expression, his quick, clear look upon them, his beautiful young smile, his not too frequent laugh, his "new gayness," as the duchess called his high spirits, his supernal youth, his *difference*, credited him with what nine-tenths of the human race lack—charm.

His tone was not too crudely western; neither did he suggest the ultra East with which they were familiar. American women went down well enough with them, but American men were un-

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popular, and when the visitor arrived, Lady Galorey did not even announce him to the party gathered for "the first shoot."

The others were in the armory when the ninth gun, a young chap, six feet of him, blond as the wheat, cleanly set up and very good to look at, came in with Lily, Duchess of Breakwater. Lady Galorey, his hostess, greeted them.

"Oh, here you are, are you? Lord Mersey, Sir John Fairthrope." She mumbled the rest of the names of her companions as though she did not want them understood, then waved toward the young chap, calling him Mr. Dan Blair, and he, as she hesitated, added:

"From Blairtown, Montana."

"And give him a gun, will you, Gordon?" Lady Galorey spoke to her husband.

"I discovered Mr. Blair, Edie," the duchess announced, "and he didn't even know there was a shoot on for to-day. Fancy!"

"I guess," Dan Blair said pleasantly, "I'll just take a gun out of this bunch," and he chose

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one at random from several indicated to him by the gamekeeper. "I get my best luck when I go it blind. Right! Thanks. That's so, Lady Galorey, I didn't know there was to be any shooting until the duchess let it out."

To himself he thought with good-natured amusement, "Afraid I'll spoil their game record, maybe!" and went out along with them, following the insular noblemen like a ray of sun, smiling on the pretty woman who had discovered him in the grounds where he had been poking about by himself.

"Where, in Heaven's name, did you 'corral'—word of his own—the dear boy, Edith? How did he get to Osdene Park, or in fact anywhere, just as he is, fresh as from Eden?"

"Thought I'd let him take you by surprise, dearest. Where'd you find Dan?"

"Down by the garden house feeding the rabbits, on his knees like a little boy, his hands full of lettuces. I'd just come a cropper myself on the mare. She fell, I'm sorry to say, Edie, and

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hacked her knees quite a lot. One of those disguised ditches, you know. I was coming along leading her when I ran on your friend."

The young duchess was slender as a willow, very brunette, with a beautiful, discontented face.

"I'm going to show Dan Blair off," Lady Galorey responded, "going to give the *débutantes* a chance."

Placidly nodding, the duchess lit a cigarette and began to quote from Dan Blair's conversation: "I fancy he won't let them 'worry him'; he's too 'busy!'"

"You mean that you're going to keep him occupied?"

The duchess didn't notice this.

"*Is* he such a catch?"

Neither of the women had walked out with the guns. The duchess had a bad foot, and Lady Galorey never went anywhere she could help with her husband. She now drew her chair up to the table in the morning-room, to which they

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had both gone after the departure of the guns, and regarded with satisfaction a quantity of stationery and the red leather desk appointments.

"Sit down and smoke if you like, Lily; I'm going to fill out some lists."

"No, thanks, I'm going up to my rooms and get Parkins to 'massey' this beastly foot of mine. I must have fallen on it. But tell me first, is Mr. Blair a catch?"

Lady Galorey had opened an address book and looked up from it to reply:

"Something like ten million pounds."

"Heavens! Disgusting!"

"The richest young man 'west of some river or other.' At any rate he told me last night that it was 'clean money.' I dare say the river is responsible for its cleanliness, but that fact seemed to give him satisfaction."

The duchess was leaning on the table at Lady Galorey's side.

"Dan's father took Gordon all over the West

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that time he went to the States for a big hunt in the Rockies. He got to know Mr. Blair awfully well and liked him. The old gentleman bought a little property about that time that turned out to be a gold mine."

With persistency the duchess said:

"How d'you know it is 'clean money,' Edith? Not that it makes a rap of difference," she laughed prettily, "but how do you know that he is rich to this horrible extent?"

Lady Galorey put down her address book impatiently: "Does he look like an impostor?"

The other returned: "Even the archangel fell, my dear Edith!"

"Well," returned her friend, "this one is too young to have fallen far," and she shut up her list in desperation.

The duchess sat down on the edge of the lounge and raised her expressive eyes to Lady Galorey, who once more looked at her sarcastically, and went on:

"Gordon liked the old gentleman: he was ex-

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traordinarily generous—quite a type. They called the town after him—Blairtown: that is where the son ‘hails from.’ He was a little lad when Gordon was out and Mr. Blair promised that Dan should come over here and see us one day, and this,” she tapped the table with her pen, “seems to be the day, for he came down upon us in this breezy way without even sending a wire, ‘just turned up’ last night. Gordon’s mad about him. His father has been dead a year, and he is just twenty-two.”

“Good heavens!” murmured the duchess. Lady Galorey opened her address book again.

“Gordon’s got him terribly on his mind, my dear; he has forbidden any gambling or any bridge as long as the boy is with us. . . .”

Her companion rose and thrust her hands into the pocket of her tweed coat. She laughed softly, then went over to the long window where without, across the pane, the early winter mists were flying, chased by a furtive sun.

“Gordon said that the boy’s father treated

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him like a king, and that while the boy is here he is going to look out for him."

Over her shoulder the other threw out coldly:

"You speak as though he were in a den of thieves. I didn't know Gordon's honor was so fine. As for me, *I don't gamble, you know.*"

Lady Galorey had decided that Lily's insistent remaining gave her a chance to fill her fountain pen. She was, therefore, carefully squirting in the ink, and she flushed at her friend's last words.

Lady Galorey herself was the best bridge player in London, and cards were her passion. She did not remind the lady in the window that there were other games besides bridge, but kept both her tongue and her temper.

After a little silence in which the women followed each her own thoughts, the duchess murmured:

"I'll toddle up-stairs, Edie—let you write. Where did you say we were going to meet the guns for food?"

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"At the gate by the White Pastures. There'll be a cart and a motor going, whichever you like, around two."

"Right," her grace nodded; "I'll be on time, dearest."

And Lady Galorey with a relieved sigh heard the door close behind the duchess. Wiping her fountain pen delicately with a bit of chamois, she murmured: "Well, Dan Blair *is* out of Eden, poor dear, if he met her by the gate."

A fortune of a round ten million pounds was a small part of what this young man had come into by direct inheritance from the Copper King of Blairtown, Montana. For once the money figure had not been exaggerated, but Lady Galorey did not know about the rest of Dan's inheritance.

The young man whistling in his rooms in the bachelor quarters of Osdene Park House, dressed for dinner without the aid of a valet. When Lord Galorey had asked him "where his man-

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servant was," Dan had grinned. "Gosh, I wouldn't have one of those Johnnies hanging around me—never did have! I can put on *my* stockings all right! There was a chap on the boat I came over in who let his man put on his stockings. Can you beat that?" Blair had laughed again. "I think if anybody tickled my feet that way I would be likely to kick him in the eye."

Dressing in his room he whistled under his breath a song from a newly popular comic opera; and he intoned with his clear young voice a line of the words:

"Should-you-go-to-Mandalay."

Out through his high window, if he had looked, he would have seen the misty sweep of the park under the faint moonrise and fine shadows that the leaves made in the veiled light, but he did not look out. He was dressing for dinner without a valet and giving a great deal of care to his toilet; for the first time he was to dine in the house of a nobleman and in the pres-

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ence of a duchess; not that it meant a great deal to him—he thought it was “funny.”

In Dan Blair's twenty-two years of utterly happy days his one grief had been the death of his father. As soon as the old man had died Dan had gone off into the Rockies with his guides and not “shown up” for months. When he came back to Blairtown, as he expressed it, “he packed his grip and beat it while his shoes were good,” for the one place he could remember his father had suggested for him to go.

Blairtown was very much impressed when the heir came in from the Rockies with “a big kill,” and the orphan's ease did not seem especially disturbed. But no one in the town knew how the boy's heart ached for the old man. When Dan was six years old his father had literally picked him up by the nape of his neck and thrown him into the water like a pup and watched him swim. At eight he sent the boy off with a gun to rough-camp. Then he took Dan down in the mines with the men. His education had been won in

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Blairtown, at a school called public, but which in reality was nothing more than a pioneer district school.

On Sundays Dan dressed up and went with his father to church twice a day and in the week-days his father took him to the prayer-meetings, and at sixteen Dan went to college in California. He had just completed his course when old Blair died. Then he inherited fifty million dollars.

On the day of the shoot at Osdene, Dan dropped sixty birds. He tried very hard not to be too pleased. "Gosh," he thought to himself, "those birds fell as though they were trained all right, and the other sports were mad, I could see it." He then fell to whistling softly the air he had heard Lady Galorey play the night before from the new success at the Gaiety, and finished it as his toilet completed itself. He took up a gardenia from his dressing-table, and fastened it in his coat, stopping on the stairs on the way down to look over into the

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hall, where the men in their black clothes and the women in their shining dresses waited before going into the dining-room. The lights fell on white arms and necks, on jewels and on fine proud heads. Dan Blair had been in San Francisco and in New York, on short journeys, however, which his father, the year before, had directed him to take, but he had never seen a "show" like this.

He came slowly down the broad stairway of the Osdene Park House, the last guest. In the corner, where, behind her, a piece of fourteenth century tapestry cut a green and pink square against the rich black oak paneling, the Duchess of Breakwater sat waiting. She wore a dress of golden tulle which was simply a sheath to her slender body, and from her neck hung a long rope of diamonds caught at the end by a small black fan; there was a wreath of diamonds like shining water drops linked together in her hair. She was the grandest lady at Osdene, and renowned in more than one sense

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of the word. As Dan saw her smile at him and rise, he thought:

"She is none too sorry that I made *that* record, but I hope to heaven she won't say anything to me about it."

And the duchess did not speak of it. Telling him that he was to take her in to dinner, she laid first her fan on his arm and then her hand. And Dan, one of those fortunate creatures who are born men of the world when they get into it, gave her his arm with much grace, and as he leaned down toward her he thought to himself:

"Well, it's lucky for me I have my head on tight; a few more of those goo-goo eyes of hers and it would be as well for me to light out for the woods."

Dan liked best at Osdene Park his chin-chins with Gordon Galorey. The young man was unflatteringly frank in his choice of companions. When the duchess looked about for him to ride with her, walk with her, to find the secluded

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corners, to talk, to play with him, she was likely to discover Dan gone off with Lord Galorey, and to come upon them later, sitting enveloped in smoke, a stand of drinks by their side.

To Galorey, who had no heir or child, the boy's presence proved to be the happiest thing that had come to him for a long time. He talked a great deal to Dan about the old man. Galorey was poor and the fact of a fortune of ten million pounds possessed by this one boy was continually before his mind like an obsession. It was like looking down into a gold mine. Galorey tried often to broach the subject of money, but Dan kept off. At length Galorey asked boldly:

"What are you going to do with it?" On this occasion they were walking over from the lower park back to the house, a couple of terriers at their heels.

"Do with what?" Blair asked innocently. He was looking at the trees. He was comparing their grayish green trunks and their foliage with

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the California redwoods. A little taken aback, Lord Galorey laughed.

"Why, with that colossal fortune of yours."

And Blair answered unhesitatingly: "Oh—spend it on some girl sooner or later."

Galorey fairly staggered. Then he took it humorously.

"My dear chap, I never saw a sweeter, bigger man than your father. If he had been my father, I dare say I might have pulled off a different yard of hemp, but I must confess that I think he has left you too much money."

"Well, there are a lot of fellows who are ready to look after it for me," Blair answered coolly. Before his companion could redden, he continued: "You see, dad took care of me for twenty-one years all right, and whenever I am up a stump, why all I have to do is to remember the things he did."

For the first time since his arrival at Osdene Dan's tone was serious. Interested as he was in the older man, Dan's inclination was to evade

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the discussion of serious subjects. With Blair's slang, his conversation was almost incomprehensible.

"Dad didn't gas much," the boy said, "but I could draw a map of some of the things he did say. He used to say he made his money out of the earth."

The two were walking side by side across the rich velvet of the immemorial English turf. The extreme softness of the autumn day, its shifting lights, its mellow envelope, the beauty of the park—the age, the stability, the harmony, served to touch the young fellow's spirits. At any rate there was a ring in him, an equilibrium that surprised Galorey.

"‘Most things,’ dad said to me, ‘go back to the earth.’" He struck the English turf with his stick. "Dad said a fellow had better buy those things that stay above the ground." Dan smiled frankly at his companion. "Curious thing to say, wasn't it?" he reflected. "I remembered it, and I got to wondering after I

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saw him buried, '*what are the things that stay above the ground?*' The old man never gave me another talk like that."

After a few seconds Galorey put in:

"But, my dear chap, you did give me a shock up there just now when you said you were going to spend 'all your money on some girl.'"

The millionaire took a chestnut from his pocket. He held it high above his head and the little dog that had been yelping at his heels fixed his eyes on it. Blair poised it, then threw it as far as he could. It sped through the air and the terrier ran like mad across the park.

"I like girls awfully, Gordon, and when I find the right one, why, then I'm going to feel what a bully thing it is to be rich."

Lord Galorey groaned aloud.

"My dear chap!" he exclaimed.

The spell of the day, the fragrant beauty of the time and place and hour were clearly upon Dan Blair. Lord Galorey was sympathetic to him. The terrier came tearing back with the

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chestnut held between his thick jaws. Dan bent down to take the nut from the dog and wrestled with him gently.

"Swell little grip he's got. Nice old pup! Let it go now!" And he threw the nut far again, and as the terrier ran once more Blair thrust his hands down in his pockets and began softly to whistle the tune of *Mandalay*.

He said slowly, going back to his subject: "It must be great to feel that a fellow can give her jewels like the Duchess of Breakwater's, ropes of 'em"—he nodded toward the house—"and a fine old place like this now, and motors and yachts and all kinds of stuff."

His eyes rested on the suave lines of the Elizabethan house, with its softened gables and its banked terraces. Possibly his vivid imagination pictured "some nice girl" there waiting, as they should come up, to meet him.

"I have always thought it would be bully to find a poor girl—pretty as a peach, of course—one who had never had much, and just

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cover her with things. Hey, there!" he cried to the terrier, who had come running back, "bring it to me."

They had come up to the terrace by this, and Dan's confidence, fresh as a gush of water from a rock, had ceased. His face was placid. He didn't realize what he had said.

From out of one of the long windows, dressed in a sable coat, her small head tied up in a motor scarf, the Duchess of Breakwater appeared. She greeted them severely, and Lord Galorey hear her say under her breath to Dan:

"You promised to be back to drive with me before dinner, Dan. Did you forget?"

And as Galorey left the boy to make his peace, the first smile of amusement broke over his face. He felt that the duchess had between her and her capture of Dan Blair's heart the elusive picture of some "nice girl"—not much perhaps, but it might be very hard to tear away the picture of the ideal that was ever before the blue eyes of this man who had a fortune to spend on her!

CHAPTER II

THE DUCHESS APPROVES

HIS attentions to the Duchess of Breakwater had not been so conspicuous or so absorbing as to prevent the eager mothers—who, true to her word, Lady Galorey had invited down—from laying siege to Dan Blair. Lady Galorey asked him:

“Don’t you want to marry any one of these beauties, Dan?” And Blair, with his beautiful smile and what Lily called his inspired candor, answered:

“Not on your life, Lady Galorey!”

And she agreed, “I think myself you are too young.”

“No,” Dan refuted, “you are wrong there. I shall marry as fast as I can.”

His hostess was surprised.

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"Why, I thought you wanted your fling first."

And Dan, from his chair, in which, with a book, he had been sitting when Lady Galorey found him, answered cheerfully:

"Oh, I don't like being alone. I want to go about with some one. I should like a fling all right, but I want to fling with somebody as I go."

The lady of the house was not a philosopher nor an analyst. She had certain affairs of her own and was engrossed in them and lived in them. As far as Lady Galorey was concerned the rest of the world might go and hang itself as long as it didn't do it at her gate-post. But Blair couldn't leave any one indifferent to him very long, not unless one could be indifferent to a blaze of sunlight; one must either draw the blinds down or bask in its brightness.

She laughed. "You're perfectly delicious! You mean to say you want to be married at once and let your *wife* fling around with you?"

"Just that."

THE DUCHESS APPROVES

"How sweet of you, Dan! And you won't marry one of these girls here?"

"Don't fill the bill, Lady Galorey."

"Oh, you have a sweetheart at home, then?"

"All off!" he assured her blithely, and rose, tall and straight and slender.

The Duchess of Breakwater had come in, indeed she never failed to when there was any question of finding Blair.

Dan stood straightly before the two women of an old race, and the American didn't suggest any line of noble ancestors whatsoever. His features were rather agglomerate; his muscles were possibly not the perfect elastic specimens that were those muscles whose strain and sinew had been made from the same stock for generations. He was, nevertheless, very good to look on. Any woman would have thought so, and he bent his blond head as he looked at the Duchess of Breakwater with something like benevolence, something of his father's kindness in his clear blue eyes. Neither of the

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noble ladies vaguely understood him. His hostess thought him "a good sort," not half bad, a splendid catch, and the other woman, only a few years his senior, was in love with him. The duchess had married at eighteen, tired of her bargain at twenty, and found herself a widow at twenty-five. She held a telegram in her hand.

"We've got the box for *Mandalay* to-night at the Gaiety, and let's motor in."

Only Lady Galorey hesitated, disappointed.

"Too bad—I had specially arranged for Lady Grandcourt to drive over with Eileen. I thought it would be a ripping chance for her to see Dan."

When at length the duchess had succeeded in getting Dan to herself toward the end of the day in the red room, after tea, she said:

"So you won't marry a London beauty?"

And rather coldly Dan had answered:

"Why, you talk, all of you, as if I had only to ask any girl of them, and she would jump down my throat."

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"Don't try it," the duchess answered, "unless you want to have your mouth full!"

Dan did not reply for a second, but he looked at her more seriously, conscious of her grace and her good looks. She was certainly better to look at than the simple girls with their big hands, small wits, long faces, and, as the boy expressed it, "utter lack of get-up." The duchess shone out to advantage.

"Why don't you talk to me?" she asked softly. "You know you would rather talk to me than the others."

"Yes," he said frankly; "they make me nervous."

"And I don't?"

"No," he said. "I learn a lot every time we are together."

"Learn?" she repeated, not particularly flattered by this. "What sort of things?"

"Oh, about the whole business," he returned vaguely. "You know what I mean."

"Then," she said with a slight laugh, "you

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mean to say you talk with me for *educational purposes*? What a beastly bore!"

Dan did not contradict her. She was by no means Eve to him, nor was he the raw recruit his simplicity might give one to think. He had had his temptations and his way out of them was an easy one; for he was very slow to stir, and back of all was his ideal. The reality and power of this ideal Dan knew best at moments like these. But the Duchess of Breakwater was the most lovely woman—the most dangerous woman that had come his way. He liked her—Dan was well on the way to love.

The two were alone in the big dark room. At their side the small table, from which they had taken their tea together, stood with its empty cups and its silver. Without, the day was cold and windy, and the sunset threw along the panes a red reflection. The light fell on the Duchess of Breakwater, something like a veil—a crimson veil slipped over her face and breast. She leaned toward Dan, and between them there was no

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more barrier than the western light. He felt his pulses beat and a tide rising within him. She was a delicious emanation, fragrant and near, and as he might have gathered a cluster of flowers, so in the next second he would have taken her in his arms, but from the other room just then Lady Galorey, at the piano, played a snatch from *Mandalay*, striking at once into the tune. The sound came suddenly, told them quickly some one was near, and the Duchess of Breakwater involuntarily moved back, and so knocked the small tray, jostled it, and it fell clattering to the floor.

CHAPTER III

THE BLAIRTOWN SOLOIST

BLAIRTOWN had a population of some eight thousand. There was a Presbyterian church to which Dan and his father went regularly, sitting in the bare pew when the winter's storms beat and rattled on the panes, or in the summer sunshine, when the flies thronged the window casings, when the smell of the pews and the panama fans and the hymn-books came strong to them through the heat.

One day there was a missionary sermon, and for the first time in its history a girl sang a solo in the First Presbyterian Church. Dan Blair heard it, looked up, and it made a mark in his life. A girl in a white dress trimmed with blue gentians, white cotton gloves, and golden hair, was the soloist. He knew her, that is, he

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had a nodding acquaintance with her. It was the girl at the drug store who sold soda-water, and he had asked her some hundreds of times for a "vanilla or a chocolate," but it wasn't this vulgar memory that made the little boy listen. It was the girl's voice. Standing back of the yellow-painted rail, above the minister's pulpit, above the flies, the red pews and the panama fans, she sang, and she sang into Dan Blair's soul. To speak more truly, she *made him a soul* in that moment. She awakened the boy; his collar felt tight, his cheeks grew hot. He felt his new boots, too, hard and heavy. She made him want to cry. These were the physical sensations—the material part of the awakening. The rest went on deeply inside of Dan. She broke his heart; then she healed it. She made him want to cry like a girl; then she wiped his tears.

The little boy settled back and grew more comfortable and listened, and what she sang was,

"From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral str—ands."

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Before the hymn reached its end he was a calm boy again, and the hymn took up its pictures and became like an illustrated book of travels, and he wanted to see those pea-green peaks of Greenland, to float upon the icebergs to them, and see the dawn break on the polar seas as the explorers do. . . . He should find the North Pole some day! Then he wanted to go to an African jungle, where the tiger, "tiger shining bright," should flash his stripes before his eyes! Dan would gather wreaths of coral from the straits and give them to the girl with the yellow hair! When he and his father came out together from the church, Dan chose the street that passed the soda-fountain drug store and peeped in. It was dark and cool, and behind the counter the drug clerk mixed the summer drinks: and the drug clerk mixed them from that time ever afterward—for the girl with the yellow hair never showed up in Blairtown again. She went away!

CHAPTER IV

IN THE CORAL ROOM

"**M**ANDALAY" had run at the Gaiety the season before and again opened the autumn season. Light and charming, thoroughly musical, it had toured successfully through Europe, but London was its home, and its great popularity was chiefly owing to the girl who had starred in it—Letty Lane. Her face was on every post-card, hand-bill, cosmetic box, and even popular drinks were named for her.

The night of the Osdene box party was the reopening of *Mandalay*, and the curtain went up after the overture to an outburst of applause. Dan Blair had never "crossed the pond" before this memorable visit, when he had gone straight out to Osdene Park. London theaters and London itself, indeed, were unexplored by

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him. He had seen what there was to be seen of the opera bouffe in his own country, but the brilliant, perfect performance of a company at the London Gaiety he had yet to enjoy.

The opening scene of *Mandalay* is oriental; the burst of music and the tinkling of the silvery temple bells and the effect of an extremely blue sea, made Dan "sit up," as he put it. The theatrical picture was so perfect that he lifted his head, pushed his chair back to enjoy. He was thus close to the duchess. With invigorating young enthusiasm the boy drew in his breath and waited to be amused and to hear. The tunes he already knew before the orchestra began to charm his ear.

On landing at Plymouth Dan had been keen to feel that he was really stepping into the world, and at Osdene Park he had been daily, hourly "seeing life." The youngest of the household, his youth nevertheless was not taken into consideration by any of them. No one had treated him like a junior. He had gone neck

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to neck with their pace as far as he liked, furnished them fresh amusement, and been their diversion. In all his rare unspoiled youth, Blair had been suddenly dropped down in an effete set that had whirled about him, and one by one out of the inner circle had called him to join them; and one by one with all of them Dan had whirled.

Lord Galorey had talked to him frankly, as plainly as if Dan had been his own father, and found much of the old man's common sense in his fine blond head. Lady Galorey had come to him in a moment of great anxiety, and no one but her young guest knew how badly she needed help. He had further made it known to the lady that he was not in the marriage market; that she could not have him for any of her girls. 'And as for the Duchess of Breakwater, well—he had whirled with her until his head swam. He had grown years older at the Park in the few weeks of his visit, but now for the first time, as the music of *Mandalay* struck upon his ears,

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like a ripple of distant seas, he felt like the boy who had left Blairtown to come abroad. He had spent the most part of the day in London with a man who had come over to see him from America. Dan attended to his business affairs, and the people who knew said that he had a keen head. Mr. Joshua Ruggles, his father's best friend, whom Dan this afternoon had left to go to his room at the Carlton, had put his arm with affection through the boy's:

"Don't look as though it were any too healthy down to the place you're visiting at, Dan. Plumbing all right?"

And the boy, flushing slightly, had said: "Don't you fret, Josh, I'll look after my health all right."

"There's nothing like the mountain air," returned the Westerner. "These old fogs stick in my nostrils; feel as though I could smell London clean down to my feet!"

From the corner of the box Dan looked hard

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at the stage, at the fresh brilliant costumes and the lovely chorus girls.

"Gosh," he thought to himself, "they are the prettiest ever! Dove-gray, eyes of Irish blue, mouths like roses!"

Leaning forward a little toward the duchess he whispered: "There isn't one who isn't a winner. I never struck such a box of dry goods!"

The duchess smiled on Dan with good humor. His naïve pleasure was delightful. It was like taking a child to a pantomime. She was wearing his flowers and displaying a jewel that he had found and bought for her, and which she had not hesitated to accept. She watched his eager face and his pleasure unaffected and keen. She could not believe that this young man was master of ten million pounds.

When Letty Lane appeared Blair heard a light rustle like rain through the auditorium, a murmur, and the house rose. There was a well-bred calling from the stalls, a call from the pit, and a generous applause—"Letty Lane

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—Letty Lane!" and as though she were royalty, there was a fluttering of handkerchiefs like flags. The young fellow with the others stood in the back of the box, his hands in his pockets, looking at the stage. There wasn't a girl in the chorus as pretty as this prima donna! Letty Lane came on in *Mandalay* in the first act in the dress of a fashionable princess. She was modish and worldly. For the only time in the play she was modern and conventional, and whatever breeding she might have been able to claim, from whatever class she was born, as she stood there in her beautiful gown she was grace itself, and charm. She was distinctly a star, and showed her appreciation of her audience's admiration.

At the end of the tenor solo the Princess Oltary runs into the pavilion and there changes her dress and appears once more to dance before the rajah and to prove herself the dancer he has known and loved in a café in Paris. Letty Lane's dress in this dance was the classic ballet

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dancer's, white as the leaves of a lily. She seemed to swim and float; actually to be breathed and exhaled from out her filmy gown; and the only ray of color in her costume was her own golden hair, surmounted by a small coral-colored cap, embroidered in pearls. The actress bowed to the right and left, ran to the right, ran to the left; glanced toward the Duchess of Breakwater's box; acknowledged the burst of applause; began to dance and finished her *pas seul*, and with folded hands sang her song. Her beautiful voice came out clear as crystal water from a crystal rock, and her words were cradled like doves, like boats on the boundless seas. . . .

“From India's coral strand. . . .”

But there was no hymn tune to this song of Letty Lane's in *Mandalay*! To the boy in the box, however, the words, the tune, the droning of the flies on the window-pane, the strong odor of the hymn-books and panama fans, came back,

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and the clear sunlight of Montana seemed to steal into the Gaiety as Letty Lane sang.

The Duchess of Breakwater clapped with frank enthusiasm, and said: "She is a perfect wonder, isn't she? Oh, she is *too* bewitching!"

And she turned for sympathy to her friend, who stood behind her, his face illumined. He was amazed; his blue eyes ablaze, his head bent forward, he was staring, staring at the Gaiety curtain, gone down on the first act.

He laughed softly, and the duchess heard him say:

"*Good!* Well, I should say she was! She's a girl from our town!"

When the duchess tried to share her enthusiasm with Dan he had disappeared. He left the box and with no difficulty made his way as far as the first wing.

"Can you get me an entrance?" he asked a man he had met once at Osdene and who was evidently an habitu  .

"I dare say. Rippin' show, isn't it?"



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Dan put his hand on ducal shoulders and followed the nobleman through the labyrinth of flies.

"Which of 'em do you want to see, old man?"

Dan, without replying, went forward to a small cluster of lights in one of the wings. He went forward intuitively, and his companion caught his arm: "Oh, I say, for *God's* sake, don't go on like this!"

But without response Dan continued his direction. A call page stood before the door, and Dan, on a card over the entrance, read "Miss Lane." The smell of calcium and paint and perfume and the auxiliaries hung heavy on the air. The other man saw Dan knock, knock again and then go in.

Unannounced Dan Blair opened the door of the dressing-room of the actress. Miss Lane's dressing-rooms were worth displaying to her intimate friends. They were done with great taste in coral tint. She might have been said to be in a coral cave under the sea, as far as young

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Blair was concerned. As he came in he felt his ears deaden, and the smoke of cigarettes grew so thick that he looked as through a veil. The dancer was standing in the center of the room, one hand on her hip, and in the other hand a cigarette. Her short skirt stood out around her like a bell, and over the bell fell a rain of pinkish coral strands. She wore a thin silk slip, from which her neck and arms came shining out, and her woman knelt at her feet strapping on a little coral shoe.

Blair shut the door behind him, and began to realize how rude, how impertinent his entrance would be considered. But he came boldly forward and would have introduced himself as "Dan Blair from Blairtown," but Miss Lane, who stared at the entrance through the smoke, burst into a laugh so bright, so delightful, that he was carried high up on the coral strands to the very beach. She crossed her white arms over her breast and leaned forward, as a saleswoman might lean forward over a counter, and with

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her beautifully trained voice, all sweetly she asked him:

"Hello, little boy, what will *you* take?"

Blair giggled, quick to catch her meaning, and answered: "Oh, chocolate, I guess!"

And Letty Lane laughed, put out her white hand, the one without the cigarette, and said: "Haven't got that brand on board—so sorry! Will a cocktail do? All sorts in bottles. Higgins, fix Mr. Blair a Martini."

As the dresser rose from her stooping position, the rest of Letty Lane's dressing-room unfolded out of the mist and smoke. On a sofa covered with lace pillows Blair saw a man sitting, smoking as well. He was tall and had a dark mustache. It was Prince Poniotowsky, whom Dan had already met at the Galorey shoot.

"Prince Poniotowsky," Miss Lane presented him, "Mr. Blair, of Blairtown, Montana. Say, Frederick, give me my cap, will you? It is over by your side. I've got to hustle."

The man, without moving, picked up a small

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red cap with a single plume, from the sofa at his side. In another second Letty Lane had placed it on her head of yellow hair, real yellow hair and not a doubt of it, like sunshine—not the color one gets from inside bottles. Her arms, her hands flashed with rings, priceless flashes, and the little spears pricked Dan like sharp needles.

“It’s the nicest ever!” she was saying. “How on earth did you get in here, though? Have you bought the Gaiety Theater? I’m the most exclusive girl on the stage. Who let you in?”

Her accent was English, and even that put her from him. As he looked at her he couldn’t understand how he had ever recognized her. If he had waited for another act he wouldn’t have believed the likeness real. The girl he remembered had both softened and hardened; the round features were gone, but all the angles were gone as well. Her eyes were as gray as the seas; she was painted and her lids were darkened. Seen close, she was not so divine as on the stage,

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but there was still a more thrilling charm about the fact that she was real.

"To think of any one from Montana being here to-night! Staying very long, Mr. Blair?" Between each sentence she directed Higgins, who was getting her into her bodice. "And how do you like *Mandalay*? Isn't it great?"

She addressed herself to Dan, but she smiled on both the men with extreme brilliance.

"You bet your life," he responded. "I should think it was great."

Poniotowsky rose indolently. He had not looked toward the new-comer, but had, on the other hand, followed every detail of Miss Lane's dressing.

"Better take your scarf, Letty. Hand it to Miss Lane," he directed Higgins. "It is so damned drafty in these beastly wings."

He drew his watch out, gathered up his long coat, flung it over his arm and picked up his opera hat which lay folded on Letty Lane's dressing-table.

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The call page for the third time summoned "Miss La—ne, Miss La—ane," and she took the scarf Higgins handed her and ran it through her hands, still beaming on Dan.

"Come in to see me at the Savoy on any day at two-thirty except on matinée days."

"Put on your scarf." Poniotowsky, taking it from her hands, laid it across her white shoulders, and she passed out between the two men, light as a bird, smiling, nodding, followed by the prince and the boy from Montana. The crowds began to fill the lately empty wings—dancers, chorus girls with their rustling gowns. Letty Lane said to Dan:

"Guess you'll like my solo in this act all right—it's the best thing in *Mandalay*. Now go along, and clap me hard."

It gave him a new pleasure, for she had spoken to him in real American fashion with the swift mimicry that showed her talent. Dan went slowly back to his party. As he took his seat by the duchess she said to him:

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"You went out to see Letty Lane. Do you know her?"

"Know her!" And as Dan answered, the sound of his own voice was queer to him, and his face flushed hotly. "Lord, yes. She used to be in the drug store in Blairtown. Sold soda-water to me when we were both kids. Whoever would have thought that she had that in her!" He nodded toward the stage, for Letty Lane had come on. "She sang in our church, too, but not for long."

"Who was with her in her dressing-room?" the duchess asked. Blair didn't answer. He was looking at Letty Lane. She had come to dance for the rajah and in her arms she held four white doves; each dove had a coral thread around its throat. It was a number that made her famous, *The Dove Song*. Set free, the birds flew about her, circling her blond head, surmounted by the small coral-colored cap. The doves settled on her shoulders, pecked at her lips.

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"Was it Poniotowsky?" the duchess repeated.

And Dan told her a meaningless lie. "I didn't meet any one there." And with satisfaction the duchess said:

"Then she has thrown him over, too. He was the latest and the richest. She is horribly extravagant. No man is rich enough for her, they say. Poniotowsky isn't a gold mine."

The doves had flown away to the wings and been gathered up by the Indian servants. The actress on the stage began her Indian cradle song. She came, distinctly turning toward the box party. She had never sung like this in London before. There was a freshness in her voice, a quality in her gesture, a pathos and a sweetness that delighted her audience. They fairly clamored for her, waved and called and recalled. Dan stood motionless, his eyes fastened on her, his heart rocked by the song. He didn't want any one to speak to him. He wished that none of them would breathe, and nearly as absorbed as was he, no one did speak.

CHAPTER V

AT THE CARLTON

THERE are certain natures to whom each appearance of evil, each form of delinquency is a fresh surprise. They are born simple, in the sweet sense of the word, and they go down to old age never of the world, although in a sense worldly. If Dan Blair's eyes were somewhat opened at twenty-two, he had yet the bloom on his soul. He was no fool, but his ideals stood up each on its pedestal and ready to appear one by one to him as the scenes of his life shifted and the different curtains rose. He had been trained in finance from his boyhood and he was a born financier. Money was his natural element; he could go far in it. But *woman!* He was one of those manly creatures—a knight—to whom each woman is a

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sacred thing: a dove, a crystal-clear soul, made to cherish and to protect, made to be spoiled. And in Dan were all the qualities that go to make up the unselfish, tender, foolish, and often unhappy American husband. These were some of the other things he had inherited from his father. Blair, senior, had married his first love, and whereas his boy had been trained to know money and its value, how to keep it and spend it, to save it and to make it, he had been taught nothing at all about woman. He had never been taught to distrust women, never been warned against them; he had been taught nothing but his father's memory of his mother, and the result was that he worshiped the sex and wondered at the mystery.

With Gordon Galorey and the others he had ridden, shot better than they, and had played, but with Lady Galorey and the Duchess of Breakwater he was nothing but a child. As far as his hostess was concerned, on several occasions she had put to him certain states

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of affairs, well, touchingly. Dan had been moved by the stories of sore need among the tenants, had been impressed by the necessity of reforms and rebuildings and on each occasion had given his hostess a check. She had asked him to say nothing about it to Gordon, and he had kept his silence. Dan liked Lady Galorey extremely: she was jolly, witty and friendly. She treated him as a member of the family and made no demands on him, save the ones mentioned.

In the time that he had come to know the Duchess of Breakwater she, on her part, had filled him full of other confidences. Into his young ears she poured the story of her disappointment, her disjointed life, from her worldly girlhood to her disillusion in marriage. She was beautiful when she talked and more lovely when she wept. Dan thought himself in love with the Duchess of Breakwater. His conversations with her had brought him to this conclusion. They had motored from Osdene Park to-

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gether, and he had been extremely taken with the pleasure of it, and with the fact of their real companionship. Two or three times the words had been on his lips, which were fated not to be spoken then, however, and Dan reached the Gaiety still unfettered, his duchess by his side. And then the orchestra had begun to play *Mandalay*, the curtain had gone up and Letty Lane had come out on the boards. But her apparition did not strike off his chains immediately, nor did he renounce his plan to tell the duchess the very next day that he loved her.

When with sparkling eyes Lady Galorey raved about *Mandalay*, Dan listened with eagerness. Everybody seemed to know all about Letty Lane, but he alone knew from what town she had come!

They went for supper at the Carlton after the theater.

"Letty," Lady Galorey said, "tells it herself how the impresario heard her sing in some country church—picked her up then and there

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and brought her over here, and they say she married him."

Dan Blair could have told them how she had sung in that little church that day. Dan was eating his caviare sandwich. "Her name *then* was Sally Towney," he murmured. How little he had guessed that she was singing herself right out of that church and into the London Gaiety Theater! Anyway, she had made him "sit up!" It was a far cry from Montana to the London Gaiety. And so she married the greasy Jew who had discovered her!

Dan glanced over at the Duchess of Breakwater. She was looking well, exquisitely high bred, and she impressed him. She leaned slightly over to him, laughing. He had hardly dared to meet her eyes that day, fearing that she might read his secret. She had told him that in her own right she was a countess—the Countess of Stainer. Titles didn't cut any ice with him. At any rate, she would be able to "buy back the old farm"—that is the way Dan put it. She

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had told him of the beautiful old Stainer Court, mortgaged and hung up with debts, as deep in ruins as the ivy was thick on the walls.

As Dan looked over at the duchess he saw the other people staring and looking about at a table near. It was spread a little to their left for four people, a great bouquet of orchids in the center.

"There," Galorey said, "there's Letty Lane." And the singer came in, followed by three men, the first of them the Prince Poniotowsky, indolent, bored, haughty, his eye-glass dangling. Miss Lane was dressed in black, a superb costume of faultless cut, and it enfolded her like a shadow; as a shadow might enfold a specter, for the dancer was as pale as the dead. She had neither painted nor rouged, she had evidently employed no coquetry to disguise her fag; rather she seemed to be on the verge of a serious illness, and presented a striking contrast to the brilliant creature, who had shone before their eyes not an hour before. Her dress was

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a challenge to the more gay and delicate affairs the other women in the restaurant wore. The gown came severely up to her chin. Its high collar closed around with a pearl necklace; from her ears fell pearls, long, creamy and priceless. She wore a great feathered hat, which, drooping, almost hid her small, pale face and her golden hair. She drew off her gloves as she came in and her white, jeweled hands flashed. She looked infinitely tired and extremely bored. As soon as she took her seat at the table intended for her party, Poniotowsky poured her out a glass of champagne, which she drank off as though it were water.

"Gad," Lord Galorey said, "she *is* a stunner! What a figure, and what a head, and what daring to dress like that!"

"She knows how to make herself conspicuous," said the Duchess of Breakwater.

"She looks extremely ill," said Lady Galorey. "The pace she goes will do her up in a year or two."

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Dan Blair had his back to her, and when they rose to leave he was the last to pass out. Letty Lane saw him, and a light broke over her pallid face. She nodded and smiled and shook her hand in a pretty little salute. If her face was pale, her lips were red, and her smile was like sunlight; and at her recognition a wave of friendly fellowship swept over the young man—a sort of loyal kinship to her which he hadn't felt for any other woman there, and which he could not have explained. In warm approval of the actress' distinction, he said softly to himself: "*That's* all right—she makes the rest of them look like thirty cents."

CHAPTER VI

GALOREY SEEKS ADVICE

BLAIR did not go back at once to Osdene Park. He stopped over in London for a few days to see Joshua Ruggles, and so remarked for the first time the difference between the speech of the old and the new world. Mr. Ruggles spoke broadly, with complete disregard of the frills and adornments of the King's English. He spoke United States of the pure, broad, western brand, and it rang out, it vibrated and swelled and rolled, and as Ruggles didn't care who heard him, nothing of what he had to say was lost.

Old Mr. Blair had left behind him a comrade, and as far as advice could go the old man knew that his Dan would not be bankrupt.

"Advice," Dan Blair senior once said to his

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boy, "is the kind of thing we want some fellow to give us when we ain't going to do the thing we ought to do, or are a little ashamed of something we have done. It's an awful good way to get cured of asking advice just to do what the fellow tells you to at once."

During Ruggles' stay in London the young fellow looked to it that Ruggles saw the sights, and the two did the principal features of the big town, to the rich enjoyment of the Westerner. Dan took his friend every night to the play, and on the fourth evening Ruggles said: "Let's go to the circus or a vawdeville, Dan. I have learned *this* show by heart!" They had been every night to see *Mandalay*.

"Oh, you go on where you like, Josh," the boy answered. "I'm going to see how she looks from the pit."

Ruggles was not a Blairtown man. He had come from farther west, and had never heard anything of Sarah Towney or Letty Lane. He applauded the actress vigorously at the Gaiety at

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first, and after the third night slept through most of the performance. When he waked up he tried to discover what attraction Letty Lane had for Dan. For the young man never left Ruggles' side, never went behind the scenes, though he seemed absorbed, as a man usually is absorbed for one reason only.

In response to a telegram from Osdene Park, Dan motored out there one afternoon, and during his absence Ruggles was surprised at his hotel by a call.

"My dear Mr. Ruggles," Lord Galorey said, for he it was the page boy fetched up, "why don't you come out to see us? All friends of old Mr. Blair's are welcome at Osdene."

Ruggles thanked Galorey and said he was not a visiting man, that he only had a short time in London, and was going to Ireland to look up "his family tree."

"There are one hundred acres of trees in Osdene," laughed Galorey; "you can climb them all." And Ruggles replied:

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"I guess I wouldn't find any O'Shaughnessy Ruggles at the top of any of 'em, my lord. The boy has gone out to see you all to-day."

Galorey nodded. "That is just why I toddled in to see you!"

Ruggles' caller had been shown to the sitting-room, where he and Dan hobnobbed and smoked during the Westerner's visit. There was a pile of papers on the table, in one corner a typewriter covered by a black cloth. Galorey took a chair and, refusing a cigarette, lit his pipe.

"I didn't have the pleasure of meeting you in the West when I was out there with Blair. I knew Dan's father rather well."

Ruggles responded: "I knew him rather well too, for thirty years. If," he went on, "Blair hadn't known you pretty well he wouldn't have sent the boy out to you as he has done. He was keen on every trail. I might say that he had been over every one of 'em like a hound before he set the boy loose."

Galorey answered, "Quite so," gravely. "I

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know it. I knew it when Dan turned up at Osdene—" Holding his pipe bowl in the palm of his slender hand, he smoked meditatively. He hadn't thought about things, as he had been doing lately, for many years. His sense of honor was the strongest thing in Gordon Galorey, the only thing in him, perhaps, that had been left unsmirched by the touch of the world. He was unquestionably a gentleman.

"Blair, however," he said, "wasn't as keen on this scent as you'd expect. His intuition was wrong."

Ruggles raised his eyebrows slightly.

"I mean to say," Lord Galorey went on, "that he knew me in the West when I had cut loose for a few blessed months from just these things into which he has sent his boy—from what, if I had a son, God knows I'd throw him as far as I could."

"Blair wanted Dan to see the world."

"Of course, that is right enough. We all have to see it, I fancy, but this boy isn't ready to look at it."

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"He is twenty-two," Ruggles returned. "When I was his age I was supporting four people."

Galorey went on: "Osdene Park at present isn't the window for Blair's boy to see life through, and that is what I have come up to London to talk to you about, Mr. Ruggles. I should like to have you take him away."

"What's Dan been up to down there?"

"Nothing as yet, but he is in the pocket of a woman—he is in a nest of women."

Ruggles' broad face had not altered its expression of quiet expectation.

"There's a lot of 'em down there?" he asked.

"There are two," Galorey said briefly, "and one of them is my wife."

Ruggles turned his cigarette between his great fingers. He was a slow thinker. He had none of old Blair's keenness, but he had other qualities. Galorey saw that he had not been quite understood, and he waited and then said:

"Lady Galorey is like the rest of modern

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wives, and I am like a lot of modern husbands. We each go our own way. My way is a worthless one, God knows I don't stand up for it, but it is not my wife's way in any sense of the word."

"Does she want Dan to go along on her road?" Ruggles asked. "And how far?"

"We are financially strapped just now," said Galorey calmly, "and she has got money from the boy." He didn't remove his pipe from his mouth; still holding it between his teeth he put his hand in his pocket, took out his wallet, drew forth four checks and laid them down before Ruggles. "It is quite a sum," Galorey noted, "sufficient to do a lot to Osdene Park in the way of needed repairs." Ruggles had never seen a smile such as curved his companion's lips. "But Osdene Park will have to be repaired by money from some other source."

Ruggles wondered how the husband had got hold of the checks, but he didn't ask and he did not look at the papers.

"When Dan came to the Park," said Galorey,

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"I stopped bridge playing, but this more than takes its place!"

Ruggles' big hand went slowly toward the checks; he touched them with his fingers and said: "Is Dan in love with your wife?"

And Lord Galorey laughed and said: "Lord no, my dear man, not even that! It is pure good nature on his part—mere prodigality. Edith appealed to him, that's all."

Relief crossed Ruggles' face. He understood in a flash the worldly woman's appeal to the rich young man and believed the story the husband told him.

"Have you spoken to the boy?"

"My dear chap, I have spoken to him about nothing. I preferred to come to you."

"You said," Ruggles continued, "there were two ladies down to your place."

Galorey had refilled his pipe and held it as before in the palm of his hand.

"I can look after the affairs of my wife, and this shan't happen again, I promise you—not at

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Osdene, but I'm afraid I can not do much in the other case. The Duchess of Breakwater has been at Osdene for nearly three weeks, and Dan is in love with her."

Ruggles put the four checks one on top of the other.

"Is the lady a widow?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"So that's the nest Dan has got into at Osdene," the Westerner said. And Galorey answered: "That is the nest."

"And he has gone out there to-day—got a wire this morning."

"The duchess has been in an awful funk," said Galorey, "because Dan's been stopping in London so long. She sent him a message, and as soon as Dan wired back that he was coming to the Park, I decided to come here and see you."

Ruggles ruminated: "Has the duchess complications financially?"

"Ra-ther!" the other answered.

And Ruggles turned his broad, honest face

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full on Galorey: "Do you think she could be bought off?"

Galorey took his pipe out of his mouth.

"It depends on how far Dan has gone on with her. To be frank with you, Mr. Ruggles, it is a case of emotion on the part of the woman. She is really in love with Dan. Gad!" exclaimed the nobleman. "I have been on the point of turning the whole brood out of doors these last days. It was like imprisoning a mountain breeze in a charnel house—a woman with her scars and her experience and that boy—I don't know where you've kept him, or how you kept him as he is, but he is as clear as water. I have talked to him and I know."

Nothing in Ruggles' expression had changed until now. His eyes glowed.

"Dan's all right," he said softly. "Don't you worry! He's all right. I guess his father knew what he was doing, and I'll bet the whole thing was just what he sent him over here for! Old Dan Blair wasn't worth a copper when the

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boy was born, and yet he had ideas about everything and he seemed to know more in that old gray head of his than a whole library of books. Dan's all right."

"My dear man," said the nobleman, "that is just where you Americans are wrong. You comfort yourself with your eternal 'Dan's all right,' and you won't see the truth. You won't breathe the word 'scandal' and yet you are thick enough in them, God knows. You won't admit them, but they are there. Now be honest and look at the truth, will you? You are a man of common sense. Dan Blair is *not* all right. He is in an infernally dangerous position. The Duchess of Breakwater will marry him. It is what she has wanted to do for years, but she has not found a man rich enough, and she will marry this boy offhand."

"Well," said the Westerner slowly, "if he loves her and if he marries her—"

"Marries her!" exclaimed the nobleman. "There you are again! Do you think marriage

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makes it any better? Why, if she went off to the Continent with him for six weeks and then set him free, that would be preferable to marrying her. My dear man," he said, leaning over the table where Ruggles sat, "if I had a boy I would rather have him marry Letty Lane of the Gaiety. Now you know what I mean."

Ruggles' face, which had hardened, relaxed.

"I have seen that lady," he exclaimed with satisfaction; "I have seen *her* several times."

Galorey sank back into his chair and neither man spoke for a few seconds. Turning it all over in his slow mind, Ruggles remembered Dan's absorption in the last few days. "So there are three women in the nest," he concluded thoughtfully, and Gordon Galorey repeated:

"No, not three. What do you mean?"

"Your wife"—Ruggles held up one finger and Galorey interrupted him to murmur:

"I'll take care of Edith."

"The Duchess of Breakwater you think won't talk of money?"

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"No, don't count on it. She is aiming at ten million pounds."

Ruggles was holding up the second finger.

"Well, I guess Dan has gone out to take care of *her* to-day."

Dan and Ruggles had seen *Mandalay* from a box, from the pit and from the stalls. On the table lay a book of the opera. While talking with Galorey, Ruggles had unconsciously arranged the checks on top of the libretto of *Mandalay*.

"I'll take care of Miss Lane," Ruggles said at length.

His lordship echoed, "Miss Lane?" and looked up in surprise. "What Miss Lane, for God's sake?"

"Miss Letty Lane at the Gaiety," Ruggles answered.

"Why, she isn't in the question, my dear man."

"You put her there just now yourself."

"Bosh!" Galorey exclaimed impatiently, "I

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spoke of her as being the limit, the last thing on the line."

"No," corrected the other, "you put the Duchess of Breakwater as the limit."

Galorey smiled frankly. "You are right, my dear chap," he accepted, "and I stand by it."

A page boy knocked at the door and came in holding out on a salver a card for Mr. Ruggles, and at the interruption Galorey rose and invited Ruggles to go out with him that night to Osdene. "Lady Galorey will be delighted."

But Ruggles shook his head. "The boy is coming back here to-night," and Galorey laughed.

"Don't you believe it! You don't know how deep in he is. You don't know the Duchess of Breakwater. Once he is with her—"

At the same time that the page boy handed Mr. Ruggles the card of the caller, he gave him as well a small envelope, which contained box tickets for the Gaiety. Ruggles examined it.

"I have got some writing to do," he told Ga-

GALOREY SEEKS ADVICE

lorey, "and I'm going to see a show to-night, and I think I'll just stay here and watch my hole."

As soon as Galorey had left the Carlton, Mr. Ruggles despatched his letters and his visitor, made a very careful toilet, and after waiting until past eight o'clock for Dan to return to dinner, dined alone on roast beef and a tart, and with perfect digestion, if somewhat thoughtful mind, left the hotel and walked down the dim street to the brilliant Strand, and on foot to the Gaiety.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE STAGE ENTRANCE

RUGGLES, from his stall, for the fourth time saw the curtain go up on *Mandalay* and heard the temple bells ring. One of the stage boxes was not occupied until after the first act and then the son of his friend came in alone and sat far back out of sight of any eyes but the keenest, and those eyes were Ruggles'. Letty Lane, delicious, fantastic, languishing, sang to Dan; that was evident to Ruggles. He was a large man and filled his stall comfortably. He sat through the performance peacefully, his hands in his pockets, his big face thoughtful, his shirt front ruffled. To look at him, one must have wondered why he had come to *Mandalay*. He scarcely lost any of the threads of his own reflections, though when Miss Lane, in response to

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a call from the house, sang her cradle song three times, he seemed moved. The tones of her pure voice, the cradling in her arms of an imaginary child, her apparent dovelike purity, her grace and sweetness, and her cooing, gentle tone, to judge by the softening of the Westerner's face, touched very much the big fellow who listened like a child. At the end he drew his handkerchief slowly across his eyes, but the tears, or rather moisture, that rose there was not all due to Miss Lane's song, for Ruggles was extremely warm.

He could see that in his box the boy sat transfixed and absorbed. Dan went out in the second entr'acte and was absent when the curtain went down. Ruggles, as well, left before the performance was over, to make his way outside the theater to the stage exit, where there was already gathered a little group, looked after by a couple of policemen. Close to the curb a gleaming motor waited, the footman at its door. Ruggles buttoned his coat up to his chin and took his

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place close to the door, over which the electric light showed the words "Stage Entrance." A poor woman elbowed him, her shabby hat adorned by a scraggly plume, a gray shawl wrapped round her shoulders. A girl or two, who might have been flower sellers in Piccadilly in the daytime, a couple of toughs, a handful of other vagrants smelling of gin, a decent man in working clothes, a child in his arms, formed the human hedge Letty Lane was to pass between—a singular group of people to spend an hour hanging about the streets at the exit of a theater well toward midnight. So the naïve Ruggles thought, and better understood the appearance of the young fellows in evening clothes who hovered on the extreme edge of the little crowd. Dan, however, was not of these.

"Look sharp, Cissy," the workingman spoke to his child, holding her well up. "When she comes hout she'll pass close to yer, and you sing hout, 'God bless yer.'"

"Yes, Dad, I will," shrilled the child.

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The woman in the gray shawl drew it close about her. "Aw she's a true lidy, all right, ain't she? I expect you've had some kindness off her as well?"

The man nodded over the child's shoulder. "Used to be a scene shifter, and Miss Lane found out about my little girl last year—not this lass, not Cissy, Cissy's sister—and she sent 'er to a place where it costs the eyes out of yer head. She's gettin' well fast, and we, none of us, has seen her or spoken to Miss Lane. She doesn't know our names."

And the woman answered: "She does a lot like that. She's got a heart bigger'n her little body."

And a big boy in the front row said back to the others: "Well, she makes a mint of money."

And the woman who had spoken before said: "She gives it nearly all to the poor."

Ruggles was evidently on the poor side of the waiting crowd; the handful of riffraff around him with its stench of dirt and gin. A better

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looking set collected opposite and there was the gleam of white shirt fronts.

"Now, there she comes," the father saw her first. "Sing out, Cissy."

The door opened and a figure quickly floated from it, like a white rose blown out into the foggy darkness. It floated down the few steps to the street between the double row of spectators. A white cloak entirely covered the actress. Her head was hidden by a white scarf, and she almost ran the short gantlet to her motor, between the cries of "God bless you!"—"Three cheers for Letty Lane"—"God bless you, lady!" She didn't speak or heed, however, or turn her head, but held her scarf against her face, and the man who slowly lounged behind her to the car, and put her in and got in after her, was not the man Joshua Ruggles had waited there to see. He hung about until the footman had sprung up and the car moved softly away, the stage entrance door shut, then he followed along with the crowd, with the

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few faithful ones who had waited an hour in the cold mist to cry out their applause, not to a singer in *Mandalay* but to a woman's heart.

CHAPTER VIII

DAN'S SIMPLICITY

THE Duchess of Breakwater was not sure how close Dan Blair's thoughts were to marriage, but the boy from Montana was the easiest prey that had come across the beautiful and unscrupulous woman's range. He had told her that he stayed on up in London to see a man from home, and when after four days he still lingered in town, she found his absence unbearable, and sent him a wire so worded that if he had a spark of interest in her he must immediately return to the Park. She had never been more lovingly than when Dan found her waiting for him.

She had ordered tea in her sitting-room. She told him that he looked frightfully seedy, asked him what he had been doing and why he had stopped so long away, and Blair told her that

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old Ruggles, his father's friend, had run over to see him with a lot of papers for Dan to read and sign and closed with a smile, telling her that he guessed she "didn't know much about business."

"I only know the horrid things of business—debts, and loans, and bills, and fussing."

"Those things are not business," Dan answered wisely; "they are just common or garden carelessness."

She asked him why he had not brought Ruggles out to Osdene, and he told her he couldn't have done a stroke of work with the old boy down here at the Park.

Stirring his tea, he appreciated the duchess. The agreeable picture she made impressed him mightily.

"Do you know," he asked suddenly, "what you make me think of?"

And she responded softly: "No, dear."

"A box of candy. This room with its stuffed walls, and you in it are good enough—"

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"To eat?" she laughed aloud. "Oh, you perfectly killing creature, what an idea!"

And as he met her eyes with his clear ones, with a simplicity she could never hope to reach, he put his tea-cup down; and as he did so the duchess observed his strong hands, their vigor, well-kept and muscular, but not the dandified hands of the man who goes often to the manicure.

"If it hadn't been for one thing," the boy went on, "I would have thought of nothing else but you, every minute I've been away."

"Mr. Ruggles?" suggested the duchess.

"No, the Gaiety girl, Letty Lane. You know I told you in the box that she was from my town."

The young man, who had flown back to Osdene Park in answer to a telegram, began to take his companion into his confidence.

"I knew that girl," Dan said, "when she wasn't more than fourteen. She sold me soda-water over the drug store counter. I always

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thought she was bully, bright as a button and pretty as a peach. Once, I remember, I took six chocolate sodas in one day just to go in and see her. I had an awful time. I most died of that jag, and yet," he said meditatively, "I don't think I ever spoke three words to her, just said 'sarsaparilla' or 'chocolate' or whatever it might happen to be. Ever since that day, ever since that jag," he said with feeling, "I couldn't *see* a stick of chocolate and keep my head up! Well," went on the boy, "Sarah Towney sang in our church for a missionary meeting, and I was there. I can remember the song she sang." He spoke with unconscious ardor. He didn't refer to the hymn, however, but went on with his narrative. "She disappeared from Blairtown. I never had a peep at her again until the other night. Gosh!" he said fervently, "when I saw her there on the stage, why, I felt as though cold water was running up and down my spine."

The duchess, as a rule, was amused by his slang. It seemed vulgar to her now.

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"Heavens," she drawled, "you are really too dreadful!"

He didn't seem to hear her.

"She's turned out a perfect wonder, hasn't she? A world-beater! Why, everybody tells me there isn't another like her in her specialty. Of course I have heard of Letty Lane, but I haven't been out to things since I went in mourning, and I've never run up against her."

"Really," drawled the duchess again, "now that you have 'run up against her' what are you going to do with her? Marry her?"

His honest stare was the greatest relief she had ever experienced. He repeated bluntly: "Marry her? Why the dickens should I?"

"You seem absorbed in her."

He agreed with her. "I am. I think she's great, don't you?"

"Hardly."

But the cold voice of the duchess did not chill him. "Simply great," he continued, "and I'm sorry for her down to the ground. That is what

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is the matter. Didn't you notice her when she came into the Carlton that night?"

"What of it, silly? I thought she looked as thin as a shad in that black dress, and the way Poniotowsky goes about with her proves what an ass he is."

"Well, I hate him," Blair simply stated; "I would wring his neck for twenty cents. But she's very ill; that is what is the matter with her."

"They all look like that off the stage," the duchess assured indifferently. "They are nothing but footlight beauties: they look ghastly off the boards. I dare say that Letty Lane *is* ill, though; the pace she goes would kill anybody. Have some more tea?"

He held out his cup and agreed with her.

"She works too hard—this playing almost every night, singing and dancing twice at the matinées, I should think she would be dead."

"Oh, I don't mean her professional engagements," murmured the duchess.

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A revolt such as had stung him when they criticized her at the Carlton rose in him now.

"It is hard to believe," he said, "when you hear her sing that dove song and that cradle song."

But his companion's laugh stopped his championship short.

"You dear boy, don't be a silly, Dan. She doesn't need your pity or your good opinion. She is perfectly satisfied. She has got a fortune in Poniotowsky, and she really is 'a perfect terror,' you know."

Affected slightly by her cold dismissal of his subject, he paused for a moment. But his own point of view was too strong to be shaken by this woman's light words.

"I suppose if she wasn't from my town—" At his words the vision of Letty Lane with the coral strands on her dress, came before his eyes, and he said honestly: "But I do take an interest in her just the same, and she's going to pieces, that's clear. Something ought to be done."

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The Duchess of Breakwater was very much annoyed.

"Are you going to talk about her all the time?" she asked with sharp sweetness. "You are not very flattering, Dan."

And he returned peacefully, "Why, I thought you might be able to help her in some way or another."

"*Me!*" She laughed aloud. "Me help Letty Lane? Really—"

"Why, you might get her to sing out here," he suggested. "That would sort of get hold of her; women know how to do those things."

His preposterous simplicity overwhelmed her. She stirred her tea, and said, controlling herself, "Why, what on earth would you have me to say to Letty Lane?"

"Oh, just be nice to her," he suggested. "Tell her to take care of herself and to brace up. Get some nice woman to—"

The duchess helped him. "To reform her?"

"Do her good," the boy said gently.

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"You're too silly for words. If you were not such a hopeless child I would be furious with you. Why, my dear boy, she would laugh in your face and in mine."

As the duchess left the tea-table she repeated: "Is this what you came up from London to talk to me about?"

And at the touch of her dress as she passed him—at the look she gave him from her eyes, Dan flushed and said honestly: "Why, I told you that she was the only thing that kept me from thinking about you all the time."

CHAPTER IX

DISAPPOINTMENT

DAN BLAIR had not been back of the scenes at the Gaiety since his first call on the singer. Indeed, though he had told the duchess he pitied Miss Lane, he had not been able to approach her very closely, even in his own thoughts. When she first appeared on his horizon his mind was full of the Duchess of Breakwater, and the singer had only hovered round his more profound feelings for another woman. But Letty Lane was an atmosphere in Dan's mind which he was not yet able to understand. There was so little left that was connected with his old home, certainly nothing in the British Isles, excepting Ruggles, and to the young man everything from America had its value. Decidedly the nice girl of whom

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he had spoken to Gordon Galorey, the print-frocked, sunbonneted type, the ideal girl that Dan would like to marry and to spoil, had not crossed his path. The Duchess of Breakwater did not suggest her, nor did any of the London beauties. Dan's first ideal was beginning to fade.

He left Osdene Park on protest and returned the same night to London, and all the way back to town tried to register in his mind, unused to analysis, his experience with the Duchess of Breakwater on this last visit.

He had experienced his first disappointment in the sex, and this disappointment had been of an unusual kind. It was not that he had been turned down or given the mitten, but he had seen one woman turn another down. A woman had been mean, so he put it, and the fact that the Duchess of Breakwater had refused to lend a moral hand to the singer at the Gaiety hurt Dan's feelings. Then, as soon as his enthusiasm had calmed, he saw what a stupid ass he had been. A duchess couldn't mix up with a comic

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opera singer, of course. Still, he mused, "she might have been a little nicer about it."

The education his father had given him about women, the slender information he had about them, was put to the test now; the girl he had dreamed of, "the nice girl," well, she would have had a tenderer way with her in a case such as this! Back of Dan's hurt feelings, there was a great deal on the Duchess of Breakwater's side. She had not done for herself yet. She hadn't fetched him nearly up to the altar for nothing, and back of his disapproval, there was a long list of admirations and looks, memories of many tête-à-têtes and of more fervent kisses which scored a good deal in the favor of Dan's first woman. The Duchess of Breakwater had gone boldly on with Dan's unfinished education, and he really thought he loved her, and that he was in honor bound to see the thing through.

That evening, once more in the box he had taken all to himself, he listened to *Mandalay*,

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carried away with the charm of the music and carried away by the singer. He was in the box nearest the stage and seemed close to her, and he imagined that under her paint he could see her pallor and how thin she was. Nothing, however, in her acting or in her voice revealed the least fatigue. Blair had obtained a card of entrance to the theater, which permitted him to circulate freely behind the scenes, and although as yet the run of his visits had not been clear, this night he had a purpose. Dan stood not far from the corridor that led to Letty Lane's room, and saw her after her act hurriedly cross the stage, a big white shawl wrapping her slender form closely. She was as thin as a candle. Her woman Higgins followed closely after her, and as they passed Dan, Letty Lane called to him gaily:

"Hello, you! What are you hanging around here for?"

And Dan returned: "Don't stand here in the draft. It is beastly cold."

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"Yes, Miss," her woman urged, "don't stand here."

But the actress waited nevertheless and said to Dan: "Who's the girl?"

"What girl?"

"Why, the girl you come here every night to see and are too shy to speak to. Everybody is crazy to know."

Letty Lane looked like a little girl herself in the crocheted garment her small hands held across her breast. Dan put his arm on her shoulder without realizing the familiarity of his gesture:

"Get out of this draft—get out of it quick, I say," and pushed her toward her room.

"Gracious, but you are strong." She felt the muscular touch, and his hand flat against her shoulder was warm through the wool.

"I wish *you* were strong. You work too darned hard."

Her head was covered with the coral cap and feather. Dan saw her billowy skirt, her silken

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hose, her little coral shoes. She fluttered at the door which Higgins opened.

"Why haven't you been to see me?" she asked him. "You are not very polite."

"I am coming in now."

"Not a bit of it. I'm too busy, and it is a short entr'acte. Go and see the girl you came here to see."

Dan thought that the reason she forbade him to come in was because Prince Poniotowsky waited for her in her dressing-room. It was his first jealous moment, and the feeling fell on him with a swoop, and its fangs fastened in him with a stinging pain. He stammered:

"I didn't come to see any girl here but you. I came to see you."

"Come to-morrow at two, at the Savoy."

But before Dan realized his own precipitation, he had seized the door-handle as Letty Lane went within and was about to close her room against him, and said quickly:

"I'm coming right in now."

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"Why, I never heard of such a thing," she answered sharply, angrily; "you must be crazy! Take away your hand!" And hers, as well as his, seized the handle of the door. Her small ice-cold hand brought him to his senses.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured confusedly. "Do go in and get warm if you can."

But instead of obeying, now that the rude young man withdrew his importuning, Miss Lane's hands fell from the knob, and close to his eyes she swayed before him, and Dan caught her in his arms—went into her room, carrying her. He had been wrong about Prince Poniotowsky; save for Higgins, the room was empty. The woman, though she exclaimed, showed no great surprise and seemed prepared for such a fainting spell. Dan laid the actress on the sofa and then the dresser said to him:

"Please go, sir; I can quite manage. She has these turns often. I'll give her brandy. She will be quite right."

But Dan hesitated, looking at the bit of hu-

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manity that he had laid with great gentleness on the divan covered with pillows. Letty Lane lay there, small as a little child, inanimate as death. It was hard to think the quiet little form could contain such life, fire and motion, or that this senseless little creature held London with her voice and grace. Higgins knelt down by Letty Lane's side, quiet, capable, going about the business of resuscitating her lady much as she laced the singer's bodice and shoes. "If you would be so good as to open the door, sir, and send me a call page. They'll have to linger out this entr'acte or put on some feature."

"But," exclaimed Blair, "she can't go back to-night?"

"Lord, yes," Higgins returned. "Here, Miss Lane; drink this."

At the door where he paused, Dan saw the girl lifted up, saw her lean on Higgins' shoulder, and assured then that she was not lifeless in good truth, he went out to do as Higgins had asked him. In a quarter of an hour the curtain

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rose and within half an hour Dan, from his box, saw the actress dance to the rajah her charming polka to the strains of the Hungarian Band.

CHAPTER X

THE BOY FROM MY TOWN

HE went the next day to see Letty Lane at the Savoy and learned that she was too ill to receive him. Mrs. Higgins in the sitting-room told him so.

Dan liked the big cordial face of the Scotch-woman who acted as companion, dresser and maid for the star. Mrs. Higgins had an affable face, one that welcomes, and she made it plain that she was not an enemy to this young caller.

The visitor, in his blue serge clothes, was less startling than most of the men that came to see her mistress.

"She works too hard, doesn't she?"

"She does everything too hard, sir."

"She ought to rest."

"I doubt if she does, even in her grave," re-

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turned Higgins. "She is too full of motion. She is like the little girl in the fairy book that danced in her grave."

Dan didn't like this comparison.

"Can't you make her hold up a little?"

Higgins smiled and shook her head.

Letty Lane's sitting-room was as full of roses as a flower garden. There were quantities of theatrical photographs in silver and leather frames on the tables and the piano. Signed portraits from crowned heads; pictures of well-known worldly men and women whom the dancer had charmed. But a full-length picture of Letty Lane herself in one of the dresses of *Mandalay* lay on the table near Dan, and he picked it up. She smiled at him enchantingly from the cardboard, across which was written in her big, dashing hand: "For the Boy from *my* Town. Letty Lane."

Dan glanced up at Mrs. Higgins.

"Why, that looks as though this were for me."

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The dressing woman nodded. "Miss Lane thought she would be able to see you to-day."

The picture in his hand, Dan gazed at it rapturously.

"I'm from Blairtown, Montana, where she came from."

"So she told me, sir."

He laid the picture back on the table, and Higgins understood that he wanted Miss Lane to give it to him herself. She led him affably to the door and affably smiled upon him. She had a frill in her hand, a thimble on her finger, and a lot of needles in her bodice. She looked motherly and useful. Blair liked to think of her with Letty Lane. He put his hand in his pocket, but she saw his gesture and reproved him quietly: "No, no, sir, please, I never do. I am just as much obliged," and her face remained so affable that Blair was not embarrassed by her refusal. His parting words were:

"Now, you make her take care of herself."

And to please him, as she opened the door,

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she pleasantly assured him that she would do her very best.

Dan went out of the Savoy feeling that he had left something of himself behind him in the motley room of an actress with its perfumed atmosphere of roses and violets. The photograph which he had laid down on the table seemed to look out at him again, and he repeated delightedly, "That one was for me, all right! I'm the 'boy from her town' and no mistake." And he thought of her as she had lain, lifelessly and pale on the dressing-room sofa, under the touch of hired hands, and how, no doubt, she had been lying in her room when he called to-day, with shades drawn, resting before the long hard evening, when London would be amused by her, delighted by her, charmed by her voice, by her body and her grace. He had wandered up as far as Piccadilly, went into a florist's and stood before the flowers. Her sitting-room had been full of roses, but Dan chose something else that had caught his eye from the window,—a huge coun-

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try basket of primroses, smelling of the earth and the spring. He sent them with his card and wrote on it, "To the Girl from My Town," and sent the gift with a pleasure as young and as fresh as was his own heart.

He got no note of acknowledgment from his flowers. Miss Lane was evidently better and played every night; no mention was made of her indisposition in the papers. But Dan couldn't go to the Gaiety or bear to see her make the effort which he knew must tire her beyond words to conceive.

After a few days he called at the Savoy to get news of her. He got as far as the lift when going up in it he saw Prince Poniotowsky. The sight affected Miss Lane's townsman so forcibly that instead of going up to the dancer's apartment Dan took himself off, and anger, displeasure and something like disgust were the only sentiments he carried away from the Savoy. He sent her no flowers, and gave himself up unreservedly to Joshua Ruggles and to a couple of



J. Graham Cooper



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men who came in to see him by appointment. And when toward four o'clock he found himself alone with Ruggles, Dan threw himself down in a big chair and looked intensely bored.

"Well, I guess we don't need to see any more of these fellows for a week, Dan," Ruggles yawned with relief. "I'm blamed if it isn't as hard to take care of money as to get it. I was a poor man once, and so was your father. Those were the days we had fun."

Ruggles took out a big cigar, struck a match sharply, and when he had lit his Henry Clay he fixed his gaze on the flying London fog, whose black curtain drew itself across their window.

"There's a lot of excitement," Ruggles said, "in not knowing what you're going to get; may turn out to be anything when you're young and on the trail. That's the way your father and me felt. And when we started out on the spot that's Blairtown on the map to-day, your father had forty dollars a week to engineer a busted mine and to pull the company into shape."

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Dan knew the story of his father's rise by heart, but he listened.

"He took on with the mine a lot of discontented half-hearted rascallions—a whole bunch, who had failed all along the line. He didn't chuck 'em out. 'There's no life in old wood, Josh,' he said to me, 'but sometimes there's fire in it, and I'm going to light up,' and he did. He won over the whole lot of them in eighteen months, and within two years he had that darned mine paying dividends. Meanwhile something came his way and he took it."

From his chair Dan asked: "You mean the Bentley claim?"

"Measles," his friend said comically, with a grin. "Your father was sick to death with them. When he was sitting up for the first time, peeling in his room, there was a fellow, an Englishman, a total stranger, come in to see him. 'Better clear out of here,' your father says to him. 'I'm shedding the damndest disease for a grown man that ever was caught.' 'I'm not afraid of

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it,' the Englishman said, 'I'm shedding worse.' When your father asked him what that was, he said the idea that he could make any money in the West. He told your father that he was going back to England and give up his western schemes, and that he had a claim to sell, and he told Blair where it lay. 'Who has seen it?' your father asked. 'Any of my men?' And the Englishman told your father that nobody had wanted to buy it and that was why he had come to him. He said he thought his only chance to sell was to hold up some blind man on his dying bed and that he had heard that Blair was too sick to stir out of his room and to prospect. Your father liked the fellow's cheek and when he found out that he had the maps with him, your father bought the whole blooming sweep at the man's price, which was a mere song.

"Your father never went near his purchase for a year or more, and when he had turned the mine he was managing over to the original company, with me as manager in his place, at a sal-

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ary of twenty thousand dollars a year, he said to me one day, 'Ruggles, you'll be sorry to know that the fun is all over, I've struck oil.' But the oil was copper. The whole blooming business that he'd bought of that Englishman was rich with ore. Well, that's the story of Blairtown," Ruggles said. "You were born there and your mother died there."

Dan said: "Galorey told me what dad did later for the man that sold him the mine, and it was just like everything else he did, for dad was all right, just as good as they come."

Ruggles agreed. He left his reminiscences abruptly. "Your dad and me had the fun in our time; now you are going to get the other kind; you're going to make the dust fly that he dug up."

And the rich young man said musingly: "I'll bet it isn't half as good at my end."

And Ruggles agreed: "Not by a jugful." And followed: "What's on to-night? *Mandalay?*"

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Dan's fury at Prince Poniotowsky came back. "I guess you thought I was a little loose in the lid, didn't you, Josh, going so often to the same play?"

"You wouldn't have been the first rich man that had the same disease," Ruggles answered.

"There is nothing the matter with *Mandalay*, but I'm not gone on any actress living, Josh; you are in the wrong pew."

Dan altered his indolent pose and sat forward. "But I *am* thinking of getting married," he said.

"I hope it's to the right girl, Dan."

And with young assurance Blair answered: "It will be if I marry her. I know what I want all right."

"I hope she knows what she wants, Dan."

"How do you mean?"

"You or your money. You have the darnedest handicap, my boy."

Blair flushed. "I'll get to hate the whole thing," he said ferociously. "It meets me everywhere — bonds — stocks — figures — dividends

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—coupons—deeds—it's too much!" he said suddenly, with resentment. "It is too much for me. Why, sometimes I feel a hundred years old, and like a hunk of gold."

Ruggles, in answer to this, said: "Why, that reminds me of what a man remarked about your father once. It was the same English chap your father bought the claim of. Speaking of Blair, he said to me: 'You know there's all kinds of metal bars, and when you cut into them some is bullion and some's coated with aluminum, and there's others that when you cut down, cut a clean yellow all along the line.' If, as you say, you feel like a hunk of metal, it ain't bad if it is that kind."

"It's got to stop coming in between me and the woman I marry, all right, though." Dan did not pursue his subject further, for his feelings about the duchess were too unreal to give him the sincere heartiness with which he would have liked to answer Ruggles.

He went over to the window, and, with his

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hands in his pockets, stood looking out at the fog. Ruggles, at the table, opened the cover of the book of *Mandalay* and took out the four checks made out to Lady Galorey and which he had forgotten. He hurriedly thrust them into his pocket.

"Come away, Dannie," he said cheerfully, "let's do something wild. I feel up to most anything with this miserable fog down on me. If it had any nerve it would take some form or shape, so a man could choke it back."

Ruggles blew his nose violently.

"There's nothing to do," said Dan in a bored tone.

"Why don't you see who your telegram is from?" Ruggles asked him. It proved to be a suggestion from Gordon Galorey that Dan should meet him at five o'clock at the club.

"What will you do, Rug?"

"Sleep," said the Westerner serenely; "I'm nearly as happy in London as I am in Philadelphia. It's four o'clock now and I can't sleep

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more than four hours anyway. Let's have a real wild time, Dannie."

Dan looked at him doubtfully, but Ruggles' eyes were keen.

"What kind of a time do you mean?"

"Let's ask the Gaiety girl for dinner—for supper after the theater."

"Letty Lane? She wouldn't go."

"Why not?"

"She is awfully delicate; it is all she can do to keep her contracts."

He knows that, Ruggles thought. "Let's ask her and see." He went over to the table and drew out the paper. "Come on and write and ask her to go out with us to supper."

"See here, Rug, what's this for?"

"What's strange in it? She is from our state, and if you don't hustle and ask her I am going to ask her all alone."

Dan was puzzled as he sat down to the table, reflecting that it was perfectly possible that old Ruggles had fallen a prey to the charms of an

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actress. She wouldn't come, of course. He wrote a formal invitation without thinking very much of what he said or how, folded and addressed his note.

"What did you say?" Ruggles asked eagerly.

"Why, that two boys from home wanted to give her a supper."

"Well," said Ruggles, "if the answer comes while you are at the club I'll open it and give the orders. Think she'll come?"

"I do not," responded Dan rather brutally. "She's got others to take her out to supper, you bet your life."

"Well, there's none of them as rich as you are, I reckon, Dan."

And the boy turned on him violently.

"See here, Josh, if you speak to me again of my money, when there's a woman in the question—"

He did not finish his threat, but snatched up his coat and hat and gloves and went out of the door, slamming it after him.

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Mr. Ruggles' profound and happy snore was cut short by the page boy, who fetched in a note, with the Savoy stamping on the back. Ruggles opened it not without emotion.

"Dear boy," it ran, "I haven't yet thanked you for the primroses; they were perfectly sweet. There is not one of them in any of my rooms, and I'll tell you why to-night. I am crazy to accept for supper"—here she had evidently struck out her intended refusal, and closed with, "I'm coming, but don't come after me at the Gaiety, please. I'll meet you at the Carlton after the theater. Who's the other boy? L. L."

The "other boy" read the note with much difficulty, for it was badly written. "He'll have to stop sending her flowers and going every night to the theater unless he wants a row with the duchess," he said dryly. And with a certain interest in his rôle, Ruggles rang for the head waiter, and with the man's help ordered his first midnight supper for an actress.

CHAPTER XI

RUGGLES GIVES A DINNER

THE bright tide of worldly London flows after and around midnight into the various restaurants and supper rooms, and as well through the corridors and halls of the Carlton. At one of the small tables bearing a great expensive bunch of orchids and soft ferns, Josh Ruggles, in a new evening dress, sat waiting for his party. Dan had dined with Lord Galorey, and the two men had gone out together afterward, and Ruggles had not seen the boy to give him Letty Lane's note.

"Got it with you?" Blair asked when he came in, and Ruggles responded that he didn't carry love letters around in his dress clothes.

They could tell by the interest in the room when the actress was coming, and both men rose

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as Letty Lane floated in at flood tide with a crowd of last arrivals.

She had not dressed this evening with the intention that her dark simplicity of attire should be conspicuous. The cloak which Dan took from her shed the perfume of orris and revealed the woman in a blaze of sparkling *paillettes*. She seemed made out of sparkle, and her blond head, from which a bright ornament shook, was the most brilliant thing about her, though her dress from hem to throat glistened with discs of gold like moonshine on a starry sea. The actress' look of surprise when she saw Ruggles indicated that she had not expected a boy of his age.

"The other boy?" she asked. "Well, this is the nicest supper party ever! And you are awfully good to invite me."

Ruggles patted his shirt front and adjusted his cravat.

"My idea," he told her, "all the blame on me, Miss Lane. Charge it up to me! Dan here had

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cold feet from the first. He said you wouldn't come."

She laughed deliciously.

"He did? Hasn't got much faith, has he?"

Miss Lane drew her long gloves off, touched the orchids with her little hands, on which the ever present rings flashed, and went on talking to Ruggles, to whom she seemed to want to address her conversation.

"I'm simply crazy over these flowers."

The older man showed his pleasure. "My choice again! Walked up myself and chose the bunch, blame me again; ditto dinner; mine from start to finish—hope you'll like it. I would have added some Montana peas and some chocolate soda-water, only I thought you might not understand the joke."

Miss Lane beamed on him. Although he was unconscious of it, she was not fully at ease: he was not the kind of man she had expected to see. Accustomed to young fellows like the boy and their mad devotion, accustomed to men with

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whom she could be herself, the big, bluff, middle-aged gentleman with his painfully correct tie, his rumpled iron-gray hair, and his deference to her, though an unusual diversion, was a little embarrassing.

"Oh, I know your dinner is ripping, Mr. Ruggles. I'm on a diet of milk and eggs myself, and I expect your order didn't take in those." But at his fallen countenance she hurried to say: "Oh, I wouldn't have told you that if I hadn't been intending to break through."

And with childlike anticipation she clapped her hands and said: "We're going to have 'lots of fun.' Just think, they don't know what that means here in London. They say 'heaps of sport, you know.' " She imitated the accent maliciously. "It's just we Americans who know what 'lots of fun' is, isn't it?"

Near her Dan Blair's young eyes were drinking in the spectacle of delicate beauty beautifully gowned, of soft skin, glorious hair, and

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he gazed like a child at a pantomime. Under his breath he exclaimed now, with effusion, "You bet your life we are going to have lots of fun!" And turning to him, Miss Lane said:

"Six chocolate sodas running?"

"Oh, don't," he begged, "not that kind of jag."

She shook with laughter.

"Are you from Blairtown, Mr. Ruggles? I don't think I ever saw you there."

And the Westerner returned: "Well, from what Dan tells me, you're not much of a fixture yourself, Miss Lane. You were just about born and then kidnapped."

Her gay expression faded. And she repeated his word, "Kidnapped? That's a good word for it, Mr. Ruggles."

She picked up between her fingers a strand of the green fern, and looked at its delicate tracery as it lay on the palm of her hand.

"I sang one day after a missionary sermon in the Presbyterian Church." She interrupted her-

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self with a short laugh. "But I guess you're not thinking of writing my biography, are you?"

And it was Dan's voice that urged her. "Say, do go on. I was there that day with my father, and you sang simply out of sight."

"Yes," she accepted, "out of sight of Blairtown and everybody I ever knew. I went away the next day." She lifted her glass of champagne to her lips. "Here's one thing I oughtn't to do," she said, "but I'm going to just the same. I'm going to do everything I want this evening. Remember, I let you drink six glasses of chocolate soda once." She drained her glass and her friends drank with her. "I like this soup awfully. What is it?"—just touching it with her spoon.

"Why," Ruggles hastened to tell her, "it ain't a *party* soup, it's Scotch broth. But somehow it sounded good on the bill of fare. I fixed the rest of the dinner up for you and Dan, but I let myself go on the soup, it's my favorite."

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She did not eat it, however, although she said it was splendid and that she was crazy about it.

"Did you come East then?" Dan returned to what she had been saying.

"Yes, that week; went to Paris and all over the place."

She instantly fell into a sort of melancholy. It was easy to be seen that she did not want to talk about her past and yet that it fascinated her.

"Just think of it!" he exclaimed. "I never heard a word about you until I heard you sing the other night."

The actress laughed and told him that he had made up for lost time, and that he was a regular "sitter" now at the Gaiety.

Ruggles said, "He took me every night to see you dance until I balked, Miss Lane."

"Still, it's a perfectly great show, Mr. Ruggles, don't you think so? I like it better than any part I ever had. I am interested about it for the sake of the man who wrote it, too. It's

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his first opera; he's an invalid and has a wife and five kids to look after."

And Ruggles replied, "Oh, gracious! I feel better than ever, having gone ten times, although I wasn't *very* sore about it before! Ain't you going to eat anything?"

She only picked at her food, drinking what they poured in her glass, and every time she spoke to Dan a look of charming kindness crossed her face, an expression of good fellowship which Ruggles noted with interest.

"I wish you could have seen this same author to-day at the rehearsal of the play," Letty Lane went on. "He's too ill to walk and they had to carry him in a chair. We all went round to his apartments after the theater. He lives in three rooms with his whole family and he's had so many debts and so much trouble and such a poor contract that he hasn't made much out of *Mandalay*, but I guess he will out of this new piece. He hugged and kissed me until I thought he would break my neck."

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London had gone mad over Letty Lane, whose traits and contour were the admiration of the world at large and well-known even to the news-boys, and whose likeness was nearly as familiar as that of the Madonnas of old. Her face was oval and perfectly formed, with the reddest of mouths—the most delicious and softest of mouths—the line of her brows clear and straight, and her gray eyes large and as innocent and appealing as a child's; under their long lashes they opened up like flowers. It was said that no man could withstand their appeal; that she had but to look to make a man her slave; and as more than once she turned to Dan, smiling and gracious, Ruggles watched her, mutely thinking of what he had heard this day, for after her letter came accepting their invitation he had taken pains to find out the things he wanted to know. It had not been difficult. As her face and form were public, on every post-card and in every photographer's shop, so the actress' reputation was the property of the public.

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As Ruggles repeated these things to himself, he watched her beside the son of his old friend. They were talking—rather she was—and behind the orchids and the ferns her voice was sweet and enthralling. Ruggles tried to appreciate his bill of fare while the two appreciated each other. It was strange to Dan to have her so near and so approachable. His sights of her off the stage had been so slight and fleeting. On the boards she had seemed to be an unreal creation made for the public alone. Her dress, cut fearlessly low, displayed her lovely young bosom—soft, bloomy, white as a shell—and her head and ears were as delicate as the petals of a white rose. Low in the nape of her neck, her golden hair lay lightly, and from its soft masses fragrance came to him.

Ruggles could hear her say: “Roach came to the house and told my people that I had a fortune in my voice. I was living with my uncle and my step-aunt and working in the store. And that same day your father sent down a

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check for five hundred dollars. He said it was 'for the little girl with the sweet voice,' and it gives me a lot of pleasure to think that I began my lessons on *that money*."

The son of old Dan Blair said earnestly: "I'm darned glad you did—I'm darned glad you did!"

Letty Lane nodded. "So am I. But," with some sharpness, "I don't see why you speak that way. I've earned my way. I made a fortune for Roach all right."

"You mean the man you married?"

"Married—goodness gracious, what made you think that?" She threw back her pretty head and laughed—a laugh with the least possible merriment in it. "Oh, Heavens, marry old Job Roach! So they say *that*, do they? I never heard that. I hear a lot, but I never heard that fairy tale." She put her hands to her cheeks, which had grown crimson. "That's not true!"

Dan swore at himself for his tactless stupidity.

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Ruggles had heard both sides. She was adored by the poor, and, as far as rumor knew, she spent thousands on the London paupers, and the Westerner, who had never been given to reveling in scandals and to whom there was something wicked in speaking ill of a woman, no matter whom she might be, listened with embarrassment to tales he had been told in answer to his other questions; and turned with relief to the stories of Letty Lane's charity, and to the stories of her popularity and her success. They were more agreeable, but they couldn't make him forget the rest, and now as he looked at her face across the bouquet of orchids and ferns, it was with a sinking of heart, a great pity for her, and still a decided enmity. He disapproved of her down to the ground. He didn't let himself think how he felt, but it was for the boy. Ruggles was not a man of the world in any sense; he was simple and Puritan in his judgments, and his gentle nature and his big heart kept him from pharisaical and strenuous

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measures. He had been led in what he was doing to-night by a diplomacy and a common sense that few men east of the Mississippi would have thought out under the circumstances.

"Tell Mr. Ruggles," he heard Dan say to her, "tell him—tell him!"

And she answered:

"I was telling Mr. Blair that, as he is so frightfully rich, I want him to give me some money."

Ruggles gasped, but answered quietly:

"Well, he's a great giver, Miss Lane."

"I guess he is if he's like his father!" she returned. "I am trying to get a lot, though, out of him, and when you asked me to dine to-night I said to myself, 'I'll accept, for it will be a good time to ask Mr. Blair to help me out in what I want to do.'"

At Ruggles' face she smiled sweetly and said graciously:

"Oh, don't think I wouldn't have come anyway. But I'm awfully tired these days, and

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going out to supper is just one thing too much to do! I want Mr. Blair," she said, turning to Ruggles as if she knew a word from him would make the thing go through, "to help me build a rest home down on the English coast, for girls who get discouraged in their art. When I think of the *luck* I have had and how these things have been from the beginning, and how money has just poured in, why," she said ardently, "it just makes my heart ache to think of the girls who try and fail, who go on for a little while and have to give up. You can't tell,"—she nodded to Ruggles, as though she were herself a matron of forty,—“you can not tell what their temptations are or what comes up to make them go to pieces.”

Ruggles listened with interest.

“I haven't thought it all out yet, but so many come to me tired out and discouraged, and I think a nice home taken care of by a good creature like my Higgins, let us say, would be a perfect blessing to them. They could go there

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and rest and study and just think, and perhaps," she said slowly, as though while she spoke she saw a vision of a tired self, for whom there had been no rest home and no place of retreat, "perhaps a lot of them would pull through in a different way. Now to-day"—she broke her meditative tone short—"I got a letter from a hospital where a poor thing that used to sing with me in New York was dying with consumption—all gone to pieces and discouraged, and there is where your primroses went to—" she nodded to Dan. "Higgins took them. You don't mind?" And Blair, with a warmth in his voice, touched by her pity more than by her charity, said:

"Why, they grew for you, Miss Lane; I don't care what you do with them."

Letty Lane sank her head on her hands, her elbows leaned on the table. She seemed suddenly to have lost interest even in her topic. She looked around the room indifferently. The orchestra was softly playing *The Dove Song*

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from *Mandalay*, and very softly under her breath the star hummed it, her eyes vaguely fixed on some unknown scene. To Dan and to Ruggles she had grown strange. The music, her brilliancy, her sudden indifference, put her out of their commonplace reach. Ruggles to himself thought with relief:

"She doesn't care one rap for the boy anyway, thank God. She's got other fish to land."

And Dan Blair thought: "It's my infernal money again." But he was generous at heart and glad to be of service to her, and was perfectly willing to be "touched" for her poor. Then two or three men came up and joined them. She greeted them indolently, bestowing a word or a look on this one or on that; all fire and light seemed to have gone out of her, and Dan said:

"You are tired. I guess I had better take you home."

She did not appear to hear him. Indeed she was not looking at him, and Dan saw Prince

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Poniotowsky making his way toward their table across the room.

Letty Lane rose. Dan put her cloak about her shoulders, and glancing toward Ruggles and toward the boy as indifferently as she had considered the new-comers, who formed a small group around the brilliant figure of the actress, she nodded good night to both Ruggles and Blair and went up to the Hungarian as though he were her husband, who had come to take her home. However, at the door she sufficiently shook off her mood to smile slightly at Dan:

"I have had 'lots of fun,' and the Scotch broth was great! Thank you both so much."

Until they were up in their sitting-room her hosts did not exchange a word. Then Ruggles took a book up from the table and sat down with his cigar. "I am going to read a little, Dan. Slept all day; feel as wide-awake as an owl."

Dan showed no desire to be communicative, however, to Ruggles' disappointment, but he exclaimed abruptly:

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"I'll be darned, Ruggles, if I can guess what you asked her for!"

"Well, it did turn out to be a pretty expensive party for you, Dannie, didn't it?" Ruggles returned humorously. "I'll let you off from any more supper parties."

And Dan fumed as he turned his back. "*Expensive!* There you are again, Ruggles, with your infernal intrusion of money into everything I do."

When the older man found himself alone, he read a little and then put his book down to muse. And his meditations were on the tide of life and the beds it runs over; the living whirlpool as Ruggles himself had seen it coursing through London under fog and mist. It seemed now to surge up in the dark to his very windows, and the flow mysteriously passed under his windows in these silent hours when no one can see the muddy, muddy bottom over which the waters go. Out of the sound, as it flowed on, the cries rose, he thought, kindly to his ears:

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“God bless her—God bless Letty Lane!” And with this sound he closed his meditations, thinking of a more peaceful stream, the brighter, sweeter waters of the boy’s nature, translucent and clear. The vision was happier, and with it Ruggles rose and yawned, and shut his book.

CHAPTER XII

THE GREEN KNIGHT

THE Duchess of Breakwater had made Dan promise at Osdene the day he went back to London that he would take her over to her own place, Stainer Court, and with her see the beauty, ruins and traditions of the place.

When Dan got up well on in the morning, Ruggles had gone to the bank. Dan's thoughts turned from everything to Letty Lane. With irritation he put her out of his mind. There had come up between himself and the girl he had known slightly in his own town years ago a wall of partition. Every time he saw her Poniotowsky was there, condescending, arrogant, rude and proud. The prince the night before had given the tips of his fingers to Dan, nodded to Ruggles as if the Westerner had been

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his tailor, and had appropriated Letty Lane, and she had gone away under his shadow. The simplicity of Dan's life, his decent bringing up, his immaculate youth, for such it was, his aloofness from the world, made him naïve, but he was not dull. He waited—not like a skeptic who would fit every one into his pigeonholes—on the contrary, he waited to find every one as perfect as he knew they must be, and every time he tried to think of Letty Lane, Poniotowsky troubled him horribly and seemed to rise before him, and sardonically look at him through his eye-glass, making the boy's belief in good things ridiculous.

He wrote a note to Ruggles, saying that he would be back late and not to wait for him, and set out in his own car for Blankshire, where the duchess was to meet him at Stainer Court at noon. On his way out he decided that he had been a fool to discuss Letty Lane with the Duchess of Breakwater, and that it had been none of his business to put her duty before her,

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and that he had judged her quickly and unfairly. He fell in love with the lovely English country over which his motor took him, and it made him more affectionate toward the English woman. He sat back in his car, looking over the fine shooting land, the misty golden forests, as through the misty country his motor took its way. The breath of England was on his cheeks, he breathed in its odors fresh and sweet, the windless air was cool and fragrant. His cheeks grew red, his eyes shone like stars, and he was content with his youth and his lot. When they stopped at Castelene, the property belonging to Stainer Court, he felt something of proprietorship stir in him, and at Stainer Arms ordered a drink, bought petroleum, and then pushed up the avenue under the leafless giant trees, whose roots were older than his father's name or than any state of the Union. And he felt admiration and something like emotion as he saw the first towers of Stainer Court finally appear.

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The duchess waited for him in the room known as the "Green Knight's Room," because of a figure in tapestry on the walls. The legend in wool had been woven in Spain, somewhere about the time when Isabella was kind, and when in turn a continent loomed up for the world in general out of the mist. The subject of the Green Knight's tapestry was simple and convincing. On a sheer-cut village of low ferns, where daisies stood up like trees, a slender lady poised, her dark sandaled feet on the pin-like turf. Her figure was all swathed round with a spotless dress of woolly white, softened by age into a golden misty tone, and a pair of friendly and confidential rabbits sat close to her golden slippers. The lady's face was candid and mild; her eyes were soft, and around her head was wound a fillet of woven threads, mellow in tone, a red, no doubt, originally, but softened to a coral pink by time. This lady in all her grace and virginal sweetness was only half of the woven story. To her right stood a youth in forest

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green, his sword drawn, and his intention evidently to kill a creature which, near to the gentle rabbits, out of the daisied grass lifted its cruel snakelike head. For nearly five hundred years the serpent's venom had been poised, and if the serpent should start the Green Knight would strike, too, at the same magic moment.

Close to the tapestry a fire had been laid in the broad fireplace, and the duchess had ordered the luncheon table for Dan and herself spread with the cold things England knows how to combine into a delectable feast. The room was full of mediæval furnishings, but the Green Knight was the best of all. The Duchess of Breakwater took him for granted. She had known him all her life, and she had only been struck by his expensive beauty when the offer came to her from the National Museum to buy him, and she wondered how long she could afford to stick to her price.

When Dan came in he found her in a short tweed skirt, a mannish blouse, looking boyish

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and wholly charming, and she mixed him a cocktail under the Green Knight's very nose and offered it with the wisdom of the serpent itself, and the duchess didn't in the least suggest the white-robed, milk-white lady.

The friends drank their cocktails in good spirits, and Dan presented the lady with the flowers he had brought her, and he felt a strong sentiment stir at the sight of her in this old room, alone and waiting for him. The servants left them, the duchess put her hands on the boy's broad shoulders. Nearly as tall as he, she was a good example of the best-looking English woman, straight and strong, and her eyes were level, and Dan met them with his own.

"I am so glad you came," she murmured. "I've been ragging myself every minute since you went away from Osdene."

"You have? What for?"

"Because I was such a perfect prig. I'll do anything you like for Miss Lane. I mean to say, I'll arrange for a musicale and ask her to sing."

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The color rushed into Dan's face. How bully of her! What a brick this showed her to be! He said: "You are as sweet as a peach!"

The duchess' hands were still on his shoulders. She could feel his rapid breath.

"I don't make you think of a box of candy now?" she murmured, and the boy covered her hand with his own.

"I don't know what you make me think of—it is bully, whatever it is!"

If the Spanish tapestry could only have reversed its idea, and if the immaculate lady, or even one of the rabbits, could have drawn a sword to protect the Green Knight, it would have been passing well. But the woven work, when it first had been embroidered, was done for ever; it was irrevocable in its mistaken idea, that it is only the *woman* who needs protection!

CHAPTER XIII

THE FACE OF LETTY LANE

AS Dan went through the halls of the Carlton on his way to his rooms that same evening, the porter gave him two notes, which Dan went down into the smoking-room to read. He tore open the note bearing the Hotel Savoy on the envelope, and read:

“DEAR BOY: Will you come around to-night and see me about five o’clock? Don’t let anything keep you.” (Letty Lane had the habit of scratching out phrases to insert others, and there was something scratched out.) “I want to talk to you about something very important. Come sure. L. L.”

Dan looked at the clock; it was after nine, and she would be at the Gaiety going on with her performance.

The other note, which he opened more slowly,

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was from Ruggles, and it began in just the same way as the dancer's had begun:

"DEAR BOY: I have been suddenly called back to the United States. As I didn't know how to get at you, I couldn't. I had a cable that takes me right back. I get the *Lusitania* at Liverpool and you can send me a Marconi. Better make the first boat you can and come over.

"JOSHUA RUGGLES."

Ruggles left no word of advice, and unconscious of this master stroke on the part of the old man, whose heart yearned for him as for his own son, Dan folded the note up and thought no more about Ruggles.

When an hour later he came out of the Carlton he was prepared for the life of the evening. He stopped at the telephone desk and sent a telegram to Ruggles on the *Lusitania*:

"Can't come yet a while; am engaged to be married to the Duchess of Breakwater."

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He wrote this out in full and the man at the Marconi "sat up" and smiled as he wrote. With Letty Lane's badly written note in his pocket, and wondering very much at her summons of him, Dan drove to the Gaiety, and at the end of the third act went back of the scenes. There were several people in her dressing-room. Higgins was lacing her into a white bodice and Miss Lane, before her glass, was putting the rouge on her lips.

"Hello, you," she nodded to Dan.

"I am awfully sorry not to have shown up at five. Just got your note. Just got in at the hotel; been out of town all day."

Dan saw that none of the people in the room was familiar to him, and that they were out of place in the pretty brocaded nest. One of them was a Jew, a small man with a glass eye, whose fixed stare rested on Miss Lane. He had kept on his overcoat, and his derby hat hung on the back of his head.

"Give Mr. Cohen the box, Higgins," Miss

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Lane directed, and bending forward, brought her small face close to the glass, and her hands trembled as she handled the rouge stick.

Mr. Cohen in one hand held a string of pearls that fell through his fat fingers, as if eager to escape from them. Higgins obediently placed a small box in his hand.

"Take it and get out of here," she ordered Cohen. "Miss Lane has only got five minutes."

Cohen turned the stub of his cigar in his mouth unpleasantly without taking the trouble to remove it. "I'll take the box," he said rapidly, "and when I get good and ready I'll get out of here, but not before."

"Now see here," Blair began, but Miss Lane, who had finished her task, motioned him to be quiet.

"Please go out, Mr. Blair," she said. "Please go out. Mr. Cohen is here on business and I really can't see anybody just now."

Behind the Jew Higgins looked up at Dan and he understood—but he didn't heed her

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warning; nothing would have induced him to leave Letty Lane like this.

"I'm not going, though, Miss Lane," he said frankly. "I've got an appointment with you and I'm going to stay."

As he did so the other people in the room took form for him: a blind beggar with a stick in his hand, and by his side a small child wrapped in a shawl. With relief Dan saw that Poniotowsky was absent from the party.

Cohen opened the box, took its contents out and held up the jewels. "This," he said, indicating a string of pearls, "is all right, Miss Lane, and the ear-drops. The rest is no good. I'll take or leave them, as you like."

She was plainly annoyed and excited, and, as Higgins tried to lace her, moved from her dressing-table to the sofa in a state of agitation.

"Take them or leave them, as *you* like," she said, "but give me the money and go."

The Jew took from his wallet a roll of bank-notes and counted them.

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"Six," he began, but she waved him back.

"Don't tell me how much it is. I don't want to know."

"Let the other lady count it," the Jew said. "I don't do business that way."

Dan, who had laid down his overcoat and hat on a chair, came quietly forward, his hands in his pockets, and standing in front of the Jew, he said again:

"Now you look here—"

Letty Lane threw the money down on the dressing-table. "Please," she cried to Dan, "let me have the pleasure of sending this man out of my room. You can go, Cohen, and go in a hurry, too."

The Jew stuffed the pearls in his pocket and went by Dan hurriedly, as though he feared the young man intended to help him. But Dan stopped him:

"Before this deal goes through I want you to tell me why you are—"

Miss Lane broke in: "My gracious Heavens!

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Can't I even sell my jewels without being bossed? What business is it of yours, Mr. Blair? Let this man go, and go all of you—all of you. Higgins, send them out."

The blind man and the child stirred, too, at this outburst. The little girl wore a miserable hat, a wreck of a hat, in which shook a feather like a broken mast. The rest of her garments seemed made of the elements—of dirt and mud—mere flags of distress, and the odor of the poor filled the room: over the perfume and scent and smell of stage properties, this miserable smell held its own.

"Come, Daddy," whispered the child timidly, "come along."

"Oh, no, not you, not you," Letty Lane said.

Job Cohen crawled out with ten thousand pounds' worth of pearls in his pockets, and as soon as the door had closed the actress took up the roll of notes.

"Come here," she said to the child. "Now you can take your father to the home I told you

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of. It is nice and comfortable—they will treat his eyes there.”

“Miss Lane—Miss Lane!” called the page boy.

“Never mind that,” said the actress, “it is a long wait this act. I don’t go on yet.”

Higgins went to the door and opened it and stood a moment, then disappeared into the side scenes.

Letty Lane ruffled the pile of bank-notes and without looking drew out two or three bills, putting them into the child’s hands. “Don’t you lose them; stuff them down; this will keep you and your father for a couple of years. Take care of it. You are quite rich now. Don’t get robbed.”

The child tremblingly folded the notes and hid them among her rags. The tears of happiness were straggling over her face. She said finally, finding no place to stow away her riches, “I expect I’d best put them in daddy’s pocket.”

And Dan came to her aid; taking the notes

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from her, he folded and put them inside the clothes of the old beggar.

"Miss Lane," said Higgins, who had come in, "it is time you went on."

"I'll see your friends out of the theater," Blair offered. And as he did so, for the first time she looked at him, and he saw the fever in her brilliant eyes.

"Thanks awfully," she accepted. "It is perfectly crazy to give them so much money at once. Will you look after it like a good boy and see something or other about them?"

He thought of her, however, and caught up a great soft shawl from the chair, wrapped it around her tenderly, and she flitted out, Higgins after her, leaving the rest of the money scattered on her dressing-table.

"Come along," said Blair kindly to the two who stood awaiting his orders with the docility of the poor, the obedience of those who have no right to plan or suggest until told to move on. "Come, I'll see you home." And he didn't leave

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them until he had taken them in a cab to their destination—until he had persuaded the girl to let him have the money, look after it for her, come to see her the next day and tell her what to do.

Then he went back to the theater and stood up in the rear, for the house was crowded, to hear Letty sing. It was souvenir night; there were post-cards and little coral caps with feathers as *bonbonnières*. They called her out before the curtain a dozen times, and each time Dan wanted to cry "Mercy" for her. He felt as though this little act had established a friendship between them; and his hands clenched as he thought of Poniotowsky, and he tried to recall that he was an engaged man. He had an idea that Letty Lane was looking for him through the performance. She finished in a storm of applause, and flowers were strewn upon her, and Dan found himself, in spite of his resolution, going back into the wings.

This time two or three cards were sent in.

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One by one he saw the visitors refused, and Dan, without any formality, himself knocked at Letty Lane's small door, which Higgins opened, looked back over her shoulder to give his name to her mistress, and said to Dan confidently, "Wait, sir; just wait a bit." Her lips were affable. And in a few moments, to Dan's astonished delight, the actress herself appeared, a big scarf over her head and her body enveloped in her snowy cloak, and he understood with a leap of his heart that she had singled him out to take her home.

She went before him through the wings to the stage entrance, which he opened for her, and she passed out before him into the fog and the mist. For the first time Blair followed her through the crowd, which was a big one on this night. On the one side waited the poor, who wished her many blessings, and on the other side her admirers, whose thoughts were quite different. Something of this flashed through Dan's mind, —and in that moment he touched the serious part of life for the first time.

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In Letty Lane's motor, the small electric light lit over their heads and the flower vase empty, he sat beside the fragrant human creature whom London adored, and knew his place would have been envied by many a man.

"I took your friends to their place all right," he told her, "and I'm going to see them myself to-morrow. I advised the girl not to get married for her money. Say, this is awfully nice of you to let me take you home!"

She seemed small in her corner. "You were great to-night," Dan went on, "simply great! Wasn't the crowd crazy about you, though! How does it feel to stand there and hear them clap like a thunderstorm and call your name?"

She replied with effort. "It *was* a nice audience, wasn't it? Oh, I don't know how it feels. It is rather stimulating. How's the other boy?" she asked abruptly, and when Dan had said that Ruggles had left him alone in London, she turned and laughed a little.

Dan asked her why she had sent for him to-

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day. "I'm mighty sorry I was out of town," he said warmly. "Just to think you should have wanted me to do something for you and I didn't turn up. You know I would be glad to do anything. What was it? Won't you tell me what it was?"

"The Jew did it for me."

And Dan exclaimed: "It made me simply sick to see that animal in your room. I would have kicked him out if I hadn't thought that it would make an unpleasant scene for you. We have passed the Savoy." He looked out of the window, and Letty Lane replied:

"I told the driver to go to the Carlton first."

She was taking *him* home then!

"Well, you've got to come in and have some supper with me in that case," he cried eagerly, and she told him that she had taken him home because she knew that Mr. Ruggles would approve.

"Not much you won't," he said, and put his hand on the speaking tube, but she stopped him.

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"Don't give any orders in my motor, Mr. Blair. You sit still where you are."

"Do you think that I am such a simple youth that I—"

Letty Lane with a gesture of supreme ennui said to him impatiently:

"Oh, I just think I am pretty nearly tired to death; don't bother me. I want my own way."

Her voice and her gesture, her beauty and her indifference, her sort of vague lack of interest in him and in everything, put the boy, full of life as he was, out of ease, but he ventured, after a second:

"Won't you please tell me what you wanted me to do this afternoon?"

"Why, I was hard up, that's all. I have used all my salary for two months and I couldn't pay my bill at the Savoy."

"Lord!" he said fervently, "why didn't you—"

"I did. Like a fool I sent for you the first

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thing, but I was awfully glad when five o'clock came you didn't turn up. Please don't bother or speak of it again."

And burning with curiosity as to what part Poniotowsky played in her life, Dan sat quiet, not venturing to put to her any more questions. She seemed so tired and so overcome by her own thoughts. When they had turned down toward the hotel, however, he decided that he must in honor tell her his news.

"Got some news to tell you," he exclaimed abruptly. "Want you to congratulate me. I'm engaged to be married to the Duchess of Breakwater. She happens to be a great admirer of your voice."

The actress turned sharply to him and in the dark he could see her little, white face. The covering over her head fell back and she exclaimed:

"Heavens!" and impulsively put her hands out over his. "Do you really mean what you say?"

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"Yes." He nodded surprisedly. "What do you look like that for?"

Letty Lane arranged her scarf and then drew back from him and laughed.

"Oh, dear, dear, dear," she exclaimed, "and I . . . and I have been . . ."

She looked up at him swiftly as though she fancied she might detect some new quality in him which she had not observed before, but she saw only his clear, kind eyes, his charming smile and his beautiful, young ignorance, and said softly to him:

"No use to cry, little boy, if it's true! But that woman isn't half good enough for you—not half, and I guess you think it funny enough to hear *me* say so! What does the other boy from Montana say?"

"Don't know," Dan answered indifferently. "Marconied him; didn't tell him about it before he left. You see he doesn't understand England—doesn't like it."

A little dazed by the way each of the two

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women took the mention of the other, he asked timidly:

"You don't like the Duchess of Breakwater, then?"

And she laughed again.

"Goodness gracious, I don't know her; actresses don't sit around with duchesses." Then abruptly, her beautiful eyes, under their curled dark lashes, full on him, she asked:

"Do *you* like her?"

"You bet!" he said ardently. "Of course I do. I am crazy about her." Yet he realized, as he replied, that he didn't have any inclination to begin to talk about his fiancée.

They had reached the Carlton and the door of Letty Lane's motor was held open.

"Better get out," he urged, "and have something to eat."

And she, leaning a little way toward him, laughed.

"Crazy! Your engagement would be broken off to-morrow." And she further said: "If I

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really thought it would, why I'd come like a shot."

As she leaned forward, her cloak slipping from her neck, revealing her throat above the dark collar of the simple dress she wore, he looked in her dove-gray eyes, and murmured:

"Oh, say, do come along and risk it. I'm game, all right."

She hesitated, then bade him good night languidly, slipping back into her old attitude of indifference.

"I am going home to rest. Good night. I don't think the duchess would let you go, no matter what you did!"

Dan, standing there at her motor door, this beautiful, well-known woman bantering him, leaning toward him, was conscious of her alone, all snowy and small and divine in her enveloping scarf, lost in the corner of her big car.

"I hate to have you go back alone to the Savoy. I really do. Please let me—"

But she shook her head. "Tell the man the

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Savoy," and as Dan, carrying out her instructions, closed the door, he said: "I don't like that empty vase in there. Would you be very good and put some flowers in it if they came?"

She wouldn't promise, and he went on:

"Will you put only my flowers in that vase always hereafter?"

Then, "Why, of course not, goose," she said shortly. "Will you please let me close the door and go home?"

Dan walked into the Carlton when her bright motor had slipped away, his evening coat long and black flying its wings behind him, his hat on the back of his blond head, light of foot and step, a gay young figure among the late lingering crowd.

He went to his apartments and missed Ruggles in the lonely quiet of the sitting-room, but as the night before Ruggles had done, Dan in his bedroom window stood looking out at the mist and fog through which before his eyes the things he had lately seen passed and repassed, specter-

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like, winglike, across the gloom. Finally, in spite of the fact that he was an engaged man with the responsibilities of marriage before him, he could think of but one thing to take with him when he finally turned to sleep. The face of the woman he was engaged to marry eluded him, but the face under the white hood of Letty Lane was in his dreams, and in his troubled visions he saw her shining, dovelike eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

FROM INDIA'S CORAL STRANDS

MRS. HIGGINS, in Miss Lane's apartment at the Savoy, was adjusting the photographs and arranging the flowers when she was surprised by a caller, who came up without the formality of sending his name.

"Do you think," Blair asked her, "that Miss Lane would see me half a minute? I called yesterday, and the day before, as soon as I saw that there was a substitute singing in *Mandalay*. Tell her I'm as full of news as a charity report, please, and I rather guess that will fetch her."

Something fetched her, for in a few minutes she came languidly in, and by the way she smiled at her visitor it might be thought Dan Blair's name alone had brought her in. The actress had been ill for a fortnight with what

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the press notices said was influenza. She wore a teagown, long and white as foam, her hair rolled in a soft knot, and her face was pale as death. Frail and small as she was, she was more ethereal than when in perfect health.

"Don't stand a minute." And by the hand she gave him Dan led her over to the lounge where the pillows were piled and a fur-lined silk cover thrown across the sofa.

"Don't give me that heavy rug, there's that little white shawl." She pointed to it, and Dan, as he gave it to her, recognized the shawl in which she wrapped herself when she crossed the icy wings.

"It's in those infernal side scenes you get colds."

He sat down by her. She began to cough violently and he asked, troubled, "Who's taking care of you, anyway?"

"Higgins and a couple of doctors."

"That's all?"

"Yes. Why, who should be?"

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Dan didn't follow up his jealous suspicion, but asked in a tone almost paternal and softly confidential:

"How are your finances getting on?"

Her lips curved in a friendly smile. But she made a dismissing gesture with her frail little hand.

"Oh, I'm all right; Higgins told me you had some news about my poor people."

The fact that she did not take up the financial subject made him unpleasantly sure that her wants had been supplied.

"Got a whole bunch of news," Dan replied cheerfully. "I went to see the old man and the girl in their diggings. Gosh, you couldn't believe such things were true."

She drew her fine brows together. "I guess there are a good many things that would surprise you. But you don't need to tell me about hard times. That's the way I am. I'll do anything, give anything, so long as I don't have to hear hard stories." She turned to him confiden-

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tially. "Perhaps it's acting in false scenes on the stage; perhaps it's because I'm lazy and selfish, but I can't bear to hear about tales of woe."

What she said somewhat disturbed his idea of her big-hearted charity.

"I don't believe you're lazy or selfish," he said sincerely, "but I've got an idea that not many people really know you."

This amused her. Looking at him quizzically, she laughed. "I expect you think you do."

Dan answered: "Well, I guess the people that see you when you are a kid, who come from your own part of the country, have a sort of friendship." And the girl on the sofa from the depths of her shawl put out a thin little hand to him and said in a voice as lovely in tone as when she sang in *Mandalay*:

"Well, I guess that's right! I guess that's about true."

After the tenth of a second, in which she thought best to take her little cold hand away from those big warm ones, she asked:

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"Now please do tell me about the poor people."

In this way giving him to understand how really true his better idea of her had been.

"Why, the old duffer is as happy as a house afire," said the boy. "Not to boast, I've done the whole thing up as well as I knew how. I've got him into that health resort you spoke of, and the girl seems to have got a regular education vice! She wants to study something, so she's going to school."

"Go on talking," the actress invited languidly. "I love to hear you talk Montana! Don't change your twang for this beastly English drawl, whatever you do."

"You have, though, Miss Lane. I don't hear a thing of Blairtown in the way you speak."

And the girl said passionately: "I wish to God I spoke it right through! I wish I had never changed my speech or anything in me that was like home."

And the boy leaning forward as eagerly ex-

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claimed: "Oh, do you mean that? Think how crazy London is about you! Why, if you ever go back to Montana, they will carry you from the cars in a triumphal chair through the town."

She waited until she could control the emotion in her voice.

"Go on telling me about the little girl."

"She was so trusting as to give the money up to me and I guess it will draw interest for her all right."

"Thank you," smiled the actress, "you are terribly sweet. The child got Higgins to let her into my dressing-room one day after a matinée. I haven't time to see anybody except then."

Here Higgins made her appearance in the room, with an egg-nog for her lady, which, after much coaxing, Dan succeeded in getting the actress to drink. Higgins also had taken away the flowers, and Letty Lane said to Dan:

"I send them to the hospital; they make me sick." And Dan timidly asked:

"Mine, too?"

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This brought a flush across the ivory pallor of her cheek. "No, no, Higgins keeps them in the next room." And with an abrupt change of subject she asked: "Is the Duchess of Breakwater very charitable?" And Blair quickly replied:

"Anyhow she wants you to sing for her at a musicale in Park Lane when you're fit."

Miss Lane gave a soft little giggle. "Is *that* what you call being charitable?"

Dan blushed crimson and exclaimed: "Well, hardly!"

"Did you come here to ask me that?"

"I came to tell you about 'our mutual poor.' You'll let me call them that, won't you, because I happened to be in your dressing-room when they struck their vein?"

Miss Lane had drawn herself up in the corner of the sofa, and sat with her hands clasped around her knees, all swathed around and draped by the knitted shawl, her golden head like a radiant flower, appearing from a bank of snow.

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Her fragility, her sweetness, her smallness, appealed strongly to the big young fellow, whose heart was warm toward the world, whose ideals were high, and who had the chivalrous longing inherent in all good men to succor, to protect, and above all to adore. No feeling in Dan Blair had been as strong as this, to take her in his arms, to lift her up and carry her away from London and the people who applauded her, from the people that criticized her, and from Poniotowsky.

He was engaged to the Duchess of Breakwater. And as far as his being able to do anything for Letty Lane, he could only offer her this politeness from the woman he was going to marry.

"I never sing out of the theater." Her profile was to him and she looked steadily across the room. "It's a perfect fight to get the manager to consent."

Blair interrupted and said: "Oh, I'll see him; I'll make it all right."

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"Please don't," she said briskly, "it's purely a business affair. How much will she pay?"

Dan was rather shocked. "Anything you like."

And her bad humor faded at his tone, and she smiled at him. "Well, I'll tell Roach that. I guess it'll make my singing a sure thing."

She changed her position and drew a long sigh as though she were very tired, leaned her blond head with its soft disorder back on the pillow, put both her folded hands under her cheek and turned her face toward Dan. The most delicate coral-like color began to mount her cheeks, and her gray eyes regained their light.

"Will two thousand dollars be too much to ask?" she said gently.

If she had said two million to the young fellow who had not yet begun to spend his fortune, which as far as he was concerned was nothing but a name, it would not have been too much to him; not too much to have given to this small

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white creature with her lovely flushed face, and her glorious hair.

"Whatever is your price, Miss Lane, goes."

"I'll sing three songs: one from *Mandalay*, an English ballad and something or other, I don't know what now, and I expect you don't realize how cheaply you are getting them." She laughed, and began to hum a familiar air.

"I wish you would sing just one song for me."

"For another thousand?" she asked, lifting her eyebrows. "What song is it?"

And as Dan hesitated, as if unwilling to give form to words that were so full of spell to him, she said deliciously: "Why, can you see a London drawing-room listening to me sing a Presbyterian hymn tune?" Without lifting her head from the pillow she began in a charming undertone, her gray eyes fixed on his:

"From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strands,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sands."

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Blair, near her, turned pale. There rose in him the same feeling that she had stirred years ago in the little church, and at the same time others. He had lost his father since then, and he thought of him now, but that big, sad emotion was not the one that swayed him.

"Please stop," he pleaded; "don't go on. Say, there's something in that hymn that hurts."

Letty Lane, unconscious of how subtly she was playing, laughed, and suddenly remembered that Dan had sat before her that day by the side of old Mr. Blair. She asked abruptly:

"Why does the Duchess of Breakwater want me to sing?"

"Because she's crazy about your voice."

"Is she awfully rich?"

"Um . . . I don't know."

Letty Lane flashed a look at him. "Oh," she said coolly, "I guess she won't pay the price then."

Dan said: "Yes, she will; yes, she will, all right."

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"Now," Letty Lane went on, "if it were a charity affair, I could sing for nothing, and I don't doubt the duchess, if she is as benevolent as you say she is, could get me up some kind of a charity show."

Dan, who had started to rise, now leaned toward her and said: "Don't you worry about it a bit. If you'll come and sing we will make it right about the price and the charity; everything shall go your way."

She was seized upon by a violent fit of coughing, and Dan leaned toward her and put his arm around her as a brother might have done, holding her tenderly until the paroxysm was past.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed fervently, "it's heart-breaking to hear you cough like that and to think of your working as you do. Can't you stop and take a good rest? Can't you go somewhere?"

"To Greenland's icy mountains?" she responded, smiling. "I hate the cold."

"No, no; to some golden sands or other," he

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murmured under his breath. "And let me take you there."

But she pushed him back, laughing now. "No golden sands for me. I'm afraid I've got to sing in *Mandalay* to-night."

He looked at her in dismay.

She interrupted his protest: "I've promised on my word of honor, and the box-office has sold the seats with that understanding."

By her sofa, leaning over her, in a choked voice he murmured:

"You *shan't* sing! You shan't go out to-night!"

"Don't be a goose, boy," she said. "You've no right to order me like that. Stand back, please." As he did so she whisked herself off the sofa with a sudden ardor and much grace. "Now," she told him severely, "since you've begun to take that tone with me, I'm going to tell you that you mustn't come here day after day as you have been doing. I guess you know it, don't you?"

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He stood his ground, but his bright face clouded. They had been so near each other and were now so removed.

"I don't care a damn what people say," he replied.

She interrupted him. She could be wonderfully dignified, small as she was, wrapped as she was in the woollen shawl. "Well," she drawled with a sudden indolence and indifference in her voice, "I expect you'll be surprised to hear that *I* do care. Sounds awfully funny, doesn't it? But as you have been coming to the theater now night after night till everybody's talking about it—"

"You don't want my friendship," he stammered.

And Letty Lane controlled her desire to laugh at his boyish subterfuge. "No, I don't think I do."

Her tone struck him deeply: hurt him terribly. He threw his head up defiantly.

"All right, I'm turned down then," he said

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simply. "I didn't think you'd act like this to a boy you'd known all your life!"

"Don't be silly, you know as well as I do that it won't do."

He did know it and that he had already done enough to make it reasonable for the duchess, if she wanted to, to break their engagement. Slowly preparing to take his leave, he said wistfully: "Can't I help you in any way? Let me do something with you for your poor. It's a comfort to have them between us, and you can count on me."

She said she knew it. "But don't come any more to the wings; get a habit of *not* coming."

On the threshold of her door he asked her to let him know when she would sing in Park Lane, and in touching her hand he repeated that she must count on him. With more tenderness in his blue eyes than he was himself aware, he murmured devotedly:

"Take care of yourself, won't you, please?"

As Blair passed from the sitting-room into the hall and toward the lift, Mrs. Higgins

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came out hurriedly from one of the rooms and joined him.

"How did you find her, Mr. Blair?"

"Awfully seedy, Mrs. Higgins; she needs a lot of care."

"She won't take it though," returned the woman. "Just seems to let herself go, not to mind a bit, especially these last weeks. I'm glad you came in; I've been hoping you would, sir."

"I'm not any good though, she won't listen to a word I say."

It seemed to surprise the dressing woman.

"I'm sorry to hear it, sir; I thought she would. She talks about you often."

He colored like a school-boy. "Gosh, it's a shame to have her kill herself for nothing." Reluctant to talk longer with Mrs. Higgins, he added in spite of himself: "She seems so lonely."

"It's two weeks now since that human devil went away," Mrs. Higgins said unexpectedly, looking quietly into the blue eyes of the visitor. "She hasn't opened one of his letters or his tele-

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grams. She has sold every pin and brooch he ever gave her, scattered the money far and wide. You saw how she went on with Cohen, and her pearls."

Dan heard her as through a dream. Her words gave form and existence to a dreadful thing he had been trying to deny.

"Is she hard up now, Mrs. Higgins?" he asked softly. And glancing at him to see just how far she might go, the woman said:

"An actress who spends and lives as Miss Lane does is always hard up."

"Could you use money without her knowing about it?"

"Lord," exclaimed the woman, "it wouldn't be hard, sir! She only knows that there is such a thing as money when the bills come and she hasn't got a penny. Or when the poor come! She's got a heart of gold, sir, for everybody that is in need."

He took out of his wallet a wad of notes and put them in Higgins' hands. "Just pay up

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some bills on the sly, and don't you tell her on your life. I don't want her to be worried." Explaining with sensitive understanding: "It's all right, Mrs. Higgins; I'm from her town, you know." And the woman who admired him and understood him, and whose life had made her keen to read things as they were, said earnestly:

"I quite understand how it is, sir. It is just as though it came straight from 'ome. She overdraws her salary months ahead."

"Have you been with Miss Lane long?"

"Ever since she toured in Europe, and nobody could serve her without being very fond of her indeed."

Dan put out his big warm hand eagerly. "You're a corker, Mrs. Higgins."

"I could walk around the world for her, sir."

"Go ahead and do it then," he smiled, "and I'll pay for all the boot leather you wear out!"

As he went down-stairs, already too late to keep an engagement made with his fiancée, he stopped in the writing-room to scribble off a note

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of excuse to the duchess. At the opposite table Dan saw Prince Poniotowsky, writing, as well. The Hungarian did not see Blair, and when he had finished his note he called a page boy and Dan could hear him send his letter up to Miss Lane's suite. The young Westerner thought with confident exaltation, "Well, he'll get left all right, and I'm darned if I don't sit here and see him turned down!"

Dan sat on until the page returned and gave Poniotowsky a verbal message.

"Will you please come up-stairs, sir?"

And Blair saw the Hungarian rise, adjust his eye-glass, and walk toward the lift.

CHAPTER XV

GALOREY GIVES ADVICE

LORD GALOREY had long been used to seeing things go the way they would and should not, and his greatest effort had been attained on the day he gave his languid body the trouble to go in and see Ruggles.

“My God,” he muttered as he watched Dan and the duchess on the terrace together—they were nevertheless undeniably a handsome pair —“to think that this is the way I am returning old Blair’s hospitality!” And he was ashamed to recall his western experiences, when in a shack in the mountains he had watched the big stars come out in the heavens and sat late with old Dan Blair, delighted with the simple philosophies and the man’s high ideals.

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"What the devil does it all mean?" he wondered. "She has simply seduced him, that's all."

He got Dan finally to himself and without any preparation began, pushing Dan back into a big leather chair, and standing up like a judge over him:

"Now, you really must listen to me, my dear chap. I shan't rest in my grave unless I get a word with you. Your father sent you here to me and I'm damned if I know what for. I've been wondering every day about it for two months. He didn't know what this set was like or how rotten it is."

"What set?" The boy looked appallingly young as Gordon stared down at him. There wasn't a line or wrinkle on his smooth brow or on his lips and forehead finely cut and well molded—but there were the very seals of what his father would have been glad to see. The boy had the same clear look and unspoiled frankness that had charmed Galorey at the first. He had been a lazy coward to delay so long.

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"Why, the rottenness of this set right here in my house." And as the host began to see that he should have to approach a woman's name in speaking, he stopped short, his mouth wide open, and Dan thought he had been drinking.

"You are talking of marrying Lily," Gordon got out.

"I am *going* to marry her."

"You mustn't."

Blair got up out of his chair. It didn't need this attack of Galorey's to bring to his mind hints that had been dropped that Galorey was in love with the Duchess of Breakwater. It illuminated what Galorey was saying fast and incoherently.

"I mean to say, my dear chap, that you mustn't marry the Duchess of Breakwater. Look at most of these European marriages. They all go to smash. She is older than you are and she has lived her life. You are much too young."

"Hold up, Galorey; you mustn't go on, you

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know. You know I am engaged; that's all there is about it. Now, let's go and have a game of pool."

Galorey had not worked himself up to this pitch to break off now at a fatal point.

"I'm responsible for this, and by gad, Dan, I'm going to put you on your guard."

"You are responsible for nothing, Galorey, and I warn you to drop it."

"You would listen to your father if he were here, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," said the boy slowly. Then followed up with an honest, "Yes, I would."

Gordon caught eagerly, "Well, he sent you to me. Your friend Ruggles has gone off and washed his hands of you, but I can't."

Lord Galorey walked across the room briskly and came back to Dan. "First of all, you are not in love with Lily—not a bit of it. You couldn't be—and what's more she is not in love with you."

Blair laughed coolly. "You certainly have

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got things down to a fine point, Gordon. I'll be hanged if I understand your game."

Galorey went bravely on: "Therefore, if neither of you are in love, you understand that there is nothing between you but your money."

The Englishman got his point out brutally, relieved that the impersonal thing money opened a way for him. He didn't want to be the bounder and the cad that the mention of the woman would have made him.

The boy drew in an angry breath. "Gosh," he said, "that cursed money will make me crazy yet! You are not very flattering to me, Gordon, I swear, and Lily wouldn't thank you for the motives you impute to her."

"Oh, rot!" returned Gordon more tranquilly. "She hasn't got a human sentiment in her. She's a rock with a woman's face."

Dan turned his back on his host and walked off into the billiard-room. Galorey promptly followed him, took down a cue and chalked it, and said:

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"Well, come now; let's put it to the test." Blair began stacking the balls.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, when you have had time to get your first news over from Ruggles, tell her you have gone to smash and that you are a pauper."

"I don't play tricks like that," said the West-erner quietly.

"No," responded Galorey bitterly, "you let others play tricks on you."

The young man threw his cue smartly down, his youth looked contemptuously at the worldly man, and he turned pale, but he said in a low voice:

"Now, you've got to let up on this, Gordon; I thought at first you had been drinking. I won't listen. Let's get on another subject, or I'll clear out."

Galorey, however, cool and pitiful of the tangle in the boy's affairs, wouldn't let himself be angry. "You are my old chum's boy, Dan," he went on, "and I'm not going to stand by and see

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you spoil your life in silence. You are of age. You can go to the devil if you like, but you can't go there under my roof, without a word from me."

"Then I'll get out from under your roof, to-night."

"Right! I don't blame you there, but, before you go, tell Lily you have lost your money, and see what she is made of. My dear chap"—he changed his tone to one of affection—"don't be an ape; listen to me, for your father's sake; remember your whole life's happiness is in this game. Isn't it worth looking after?"

"Not at the risk of hurting a woman's feelings," said the boy.

"How can it hurt her, my dear man, to tell her you are poor?"

"It's a lie. I'm not up to lying to her; I don't care to. And you mean to think that if I told her I was busted she would throw me over?"

"Like a shot, my green young friend—like a shot."

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"You haven't a very good opinion of women," Blair threw out with as near a sneer as his fine young face could express.

"No, not very," agreed the pool player, who had continued his shots with more or less sang-froid. When Galorey had run off his string of balls he said, looking up from the table: "But I've got a very good opinion of that 'nice girl' you told me of when you first came, and I wish to Heaven she had kept you in the States."

This caught the boy's attention as nothing else had. "There never was any such girl," he said slowly; "there never has been anywhere; I rather guess they don't grow. You have made me a cad in listening to you, Gordon, but as to playing any of those comedy tricks you suggest, they are not in my line. If she is marrying me for my money, why, she'll get it."

"You're a coward," said Galorey, "like the rest of American husbands—all ideal and no common sense. You want to make a mess of your

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life. You haven't the grit to get out of a bad job."

He spurred himself on and his weak face grew strong as he felt he was compelling the boy's attention. "If you only had half the character your father had, you wouldn't make a mistake like this; you wouldn't run blind into such a deal as this."

Blair was impressed by his host. Galorey was so deadly in earnest and so honest, and, as Dan's face grew set and hardened, his companion prayed for wisdom. "If I can only win through this without touching Lily hard," he thought, and as he waited, Blair said:

"You haven't hesitated to call me names, Gordon. You're not my build or my age, and I can't thrash you."

And his host said cheerfully: "Oh, yes, you can; come on and try," and, metaphorically speaking, Dan struck his first blow:

"They say—people have said to me—that you once cared for Lily yourself."

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The Englishman's heavy eyelids did not flicker. "It's quite true."

Taken back by this frank response, Blair stammered: "Well, I guess that explains everything. It's not surprising that you should feel as you do. If you are jealous, I can forgive it a little bit, but it is low down to call a woman a fortune hunter."

Now Gordon Galorey's face changed and grew slightly white. "Don't make me angry, my dear chap," he said in a low tone; "I have said what I wanted to say. Now, go to the devil if you like and as soon as you like."

And the boy said hotly, stammering in his excitement:

"Not yet—not yet—not before I tell you what I think."

Gordon, with wonderful control of his own anger, met the boy's eyes, and said with great patience:

"No, don't, Dan; don't go on. There are many things in this affair that we can't touch

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upon. Let it drop. The right woman would make a ripping man of you, but you oughtn't to marry for ten years."

Dan took the hand which Galorey put out to him, and the Englishman said warmly: "My dear chap, I hope it will all come out right, from my heart."

Dan, who had regained his balance, said to his friend:

"I've been very angry at what you said, but you're the chap my father sent me to. There must be something back of this, and I'm going to find out what it is, and I'm going to take my own way to find out. I wouldn't give a rap for anything that came to me through a trick or a lie, and I wouldn't know how to go to her with a cock-and-bull story. I shall act as I feel and go ahead being just as I am, and perhaps she won't want me after all, even if I have got the rocks!"

And Galorey said heartily: "I wish there was a chance of it."

GALOREY GIVES ADVICE

When, later, Gordon thought of Dan it was with a glow. "What a chip of the old block he is," he said; "what a good bit of character, even at twenty-two years." He was divided between feeling that he had made a mess of things between Dan and himself, and feeling sure that some of his advice had gone home. After a moment's silence, Dan Blair's son said: "I'm going up to London to-morrow."

"For long?"

"Don't know."

Then returning with boyish simplicity to their subject, which Galorey thought had been dropped, Dan said:

"There may be something true in what you say, Gordon. Perhaps she does want my money. I'm not a titled man and I'll never be known for anything except my income. At any rate I was rich when I asked her to marry me, and I'm going to fix up that old place of hers, and I'm glad I've got the coin to do it."

When, later, for they had been interrupted in

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their conversation by the entrance of the lady herself, Gordon, as Ruggles had done, mentally thought of the flowing tide of life, and how it flowed over what he himself had called "rotten ground." Perhaps old Blair was right, he mused, after all. What does it matter if the source is pure at the head water? It's awfully hard to force it at the start, at least.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MUSICALE PROGRAM

THE duchess ran Dan, made plans, set the pace, and they were very much in evidence during the season. The young American, good-natured and generous, the duchess beautiful and knowing, were the observed of London, and those of her friends who would have tolerated Dan on account of his money, ended by sincerely liking him. The wedding-day had not been fixed as yet, and Dan was not so violently carried away that he could not wait to be married. Meanwhile Gordon Galorey thanked God for the delay and hoped for a miracle to break the spell over his friend's son before it should be too late. In early May the question came up regarding the musicale. The duchess made her list and arranged the Sunday after-

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noon and her performers to suit her taste, and the week before lounged in her boudoir when Dan and Galorey appeared for a late morning call.

"There, Dan," she said, holding out a bit of paper, "look at the list and the program, will you?"

"Sounds and reads all right," commented Dan, handing it on to Galorey.

Besides being an artistic event, she intended that the concert should serve to present Dan to her special set. She now lit a cigarette and gave one to each of her friends, lighting the Englishman's herself.

"The best names in London," Lord Galorey said. "You see, Dan, we shall trot you out in a royal way. I hope you fully appreciate how swagger this is to be."

Glancing at the list Blair remarked:

"But I don't see Miss Lane's name?"

"Why should you?" the duchess answered sharply.

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"Why, we planned all along that she was to sing," he returned.

She gave a long puff to her cigarette.

"We did *rather* speak of it. But we shall do very well as we are. The program is full up and it's perfectly ripping as it stands."

"Yes, there's only just one thing the matter with it," the boy smiled good-naturedly, "and it's easy enough to run her in. I guess Miss Lane could be run in most anywhere on any program and not clear the house."

Lord Galorey, who knew nothing about the subject under discussion, said tactfully: "Why, of course, Letty Lane is perfectly charming, but you couldn't get her, my dear chap."

"I think we will let the thing stand as it is," said the duchess, going back to her desk and stirring her paper about. "It's really too late now, you know, Dan."

Unruffled, but with a determination which Lord Galorey and the lady were far from guessing, Blair resumed tranquilly:

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"Oh, I guess she'll come in all right, late as it is. We'll send word to her and fix it up."

The duchess turned to him, annoyed: "Oh, don't be a beastly bore, dear—you are not really serious."

Dan still smiled at her sweetly. "You bet your life I am, though, Lily."

She rang a bell at the side of her desk, and when the footman came in gave him the sheet of paper. "See that this is taken at once to the stationer's."

"Better wait, Lily"—her fiancé extended his hand—"until the program is filled out the way it is going to stand." And Blair fixed his handsome eyes on his future wife. "Why, we got this shindig up," he noted irreverently, "just so Miss Lane could sing at it."

"Nonsense," she cried, angry and powerless, "you ridiculous creature! Fancy me getting up a musicale for Letty Lane! Do tell Dan to stop bothering and fussing, Gordon. He's too ridiculous!"

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And Lord Galorey said: "What is the row anyway?"

"Why, I want Miss Lane to sing here on Sunday," Dan explained. . . .

"And I don't want her," finished the Duchess of Breakwater, who was evidently unwilling to force a scene before Lord Galorey. She handed the list to her servant, but Dan intercepted it.

"Don't send out that list, Lily, as it is."

He gave it back to her, and his tone was so cool, his expression so decided and quiet, that she was disarmed, and dismissed the servant, telling him to return when she should ring again. Coloring with anger, she tapped the envelope against her brilliantly polished nails.

If she had been married to Blair she would have burst into a violent rage; if he had been poorer than he was she would have put him in his place. Lord Galorey understood the contraction of her brows and lips as Dan reminded: "You promised me that you would have her, you know, Lily."

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"Give in, Lily," Galorey advised, rising from the chair where he was lounging. "Give in gracefully."

And she turned on Galorey the anger which she dared not show the other man. But Dan interrupted her, explaining simply:

"I knew the girl when she was a kid: she is from my old home, and I want Lily to ask her here to sing for us, and then to see if we can't do something to get her out of the state she is in."

Galorey repeated vaguely, "State?"

"Why, she's all run down, tired out; she's got no real friends in London."

The other man flicked the ash from his cigarette and looked at Blair's boy through his monocle.

"And you thought that Lily might befriend her, old chap?"

"Yes," nodded Dan, "just give her a lift, you know."

Galorey nodded back, smiling gently. "I see,

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I see—a moral, spiritual lift? I see—I see.” He glanced at the woman with his strange smile.

She put her cigarette down and seated herself, clasping her hands around her knees and looked at her fiancé.

“It’s none of my business what Letty Lane’s reputation is. I don’t care, but you must understand one thing, Dan, I’m not a reformer, or a charitable institution, and if she comes here it is purely professional.”

He took the subject as settled, and asked for a copy of the program and put it in his pocket. “I’ll get the names of her songs from her and take the thing myself to Harrison’s. And I’d better hustle, I guess; there’s no time to lose between now and Sunday.” And he went out triumphant.

Galorey remained, smoking, and the duchess continued her notes in silence, cooling down at her desk. Her companion knew her too well to speak to her until she had herself in hand, and when finally she took up her pen and turned

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about, she appeared conscious for the first of his presence.

"Here still!" she exclaimed.

"I thought I might do for a safety valve, Lily. You could let some of your anger out on me."

The duchess left her desk and came over to him.

"I expect you despise me thoroughly, don't you, Gordon?"

They had not been alone together since her engagement to Blair, for she had taken pains to avoid every opportunity for a tête-à-tête.

"Despise you?" he repeated gently. "It's awfully hard, isn't it, for a chap like me to despise anybody? We're none of us used to the best quality of behavior, you know, my dear girl."

"Don't talk rot, Gordon," she murmured.

"You didn't ask my advice," he continued, "but I don't hesitate to tell you that I have done everything I could to save the boy."

She accepted this philosophically. "Oh, I

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knew you would; I quite expected it, but—" and in the look she threw at him there was more liking than resentment—"I knew you, too; you *couldn't* go very far, my dear fellow."

"I think Dan Blair is excellent stuff," Gordon said.

"He is the greenest, youngest, most ridiculous infant," she exclaimed with irritation, and he laughed.

"His money is old enough to walk, however, isn't it, Lily?" She made an angry gesture.

"I expected you'd say something loathsome."

Her companion met her eyes directly. She left her chair and came and sat down beside him on the small sofa. As he did not move, or look at her, but regarded his cigarette with interest, she leaned close to him and whispered: "Gordon, try to be nice and decent. Try to forget yourself. Don't you see what a wonderful chance it is for me, and that, as far as you and I are concerned, it can't go on?"

The face of the man by her side grew somber.

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The charm this woman had for him had never lessened since the day when he told her he loved her, long before his marriage, and they were both too poor.

"We have always been too poor, and Edith is jealous of me every day and hour of her life. Can't you be generous?"

He rose and stood over her, looking down at her beautiful form and her somewhat softened face, but his eyes were hard and his face very pale.

"You had better go, Gordon," she said slowly; "you had better go. . . ."

Then, as he obeyed her and went like a flash as far as the door, she followed him and whispered softly: "If you're really only jealous, I can forgive you."

He managed to get out: "His father was my friend; he sent the boy to me and I've been a bad guardian." He made a gesture of despair. "Put yourself in my place. Let Dan Blair go, Lily; let him go."

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Her eyelids flickered a little, and she said sharply: "You're out of your senses, Gordon—and what if I love him?"

With a low exclamation he caught her hand at the wrist so hard that she cried out, and he said between his teeth: "You *don't* love him! Take those words back!"

"Of course I do. Let me free!"

"No," he said passionately, holding her fast. "Not until you take that back."

His face, his tone, his force, dominated her; the remembrance of their past, a possible future, made her waver under his eyes, and the woman smiled at him as Blair had never seen her smile.

"Very well, then, goose," she capitulated almost tenderly; "I don't love that boy, of course. I'm marrying him for his money. Now, will you let me go?"

But he held her still more firmly and kissed her several times before he finally set her free, and went out of the house miserable—bound to her by the strongest chains—bound in his conscience

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and by honor to his trust to Dan's father, and yet handicapped by another sense of honor which decrees that man must keep silence to the end.

CHAPTER XVII

LETTY LANE SINGS

THE house of the Duchess of Breakwater in Park Lane was white, with green blinds and green balconies; beautiful, distinguished and old, mellow with traditions, and the tide of fashion poured its stream into the music-room to listen to the Sunday concert. Without, the day was bland and beautiful, mild spring in the deep sweet air, and already the bloom lay over the park and along the turf. Piccadilly was ablaze with flowers, and in the windows and in the flower-women's baskets they were so sweet as to make the heart ache and to make the senses thrill. Keen to the spring beauty, the last guest to go into the drawing-room of the Duchess of Breakwater was the young American man in whom the magic of the season had stirred the blood. He

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seemed the youngest and the brightest guest to cross the sill of the great house whose debts he was going to pay, and whose future he was going to secure with American money.

Close after him a motor car rolled up to the curb, and under the awning Letty Lane passed quickly, as though thistledown, blown into the distinguished house. The actress was taken possession of by several people and shown up-stairs.

Dan spoke to his hostess, who wore, over her azure dress, a necklace given her by Dan. She said he was "too late for words," and why hadn't he come before. After greeting him she set him free, and he went eagerly to find his place next an elderly woman whom he liked immensely, Lady Caiwarn. She had given him twenty pounds for some of his poor. Lady Caiwarn had a calm, kind face, and Dan sat down beside her, well out of the crush, and they talked amiably throughout the violin solo.

"Think of it," she said, "Letty Lane of the Gaiety is going to sing. I'd sit through a great

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deal for that. Let that man with the fiddle do his worst."

Blair laughed appreciatively. He thought Lady Caiwarn would be a good friend for Miss Lane, better than the duchess herself. "I wish Lily could hear you talk about her violinist," he said, delighted; "she thinks he's the whole show." And tentatively, his ingenuous eyes fixed on his friend, he asked: "I wonder how you would like to meet Miss Lane. She's perfectly ripping, and she's from my State."

"*Meet her!*" Lady Caiwarn exclaimed, but before she could finish, through the room ran the little anticipatory rustle that comes before the great, and which, when they have gone, breaks into applause. The great actress had appeared to give her number. Dan and Lady Caiwarn, behind the palms in a little corner of their own, watched her.

A clever understanding of the world into which she was to come this day, had made the girl dress like a charm. She stood quietly by

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the piano, her hands folded. Among the high ladies of the English world in their splendid frocks, their jewels and feathers, she was a simple figure, her dress snow white, high to her throat, unadorned by any gay color, according to the fashion of the time. It was such a dress as Romney might have painted, and under her arms and from across her breast there fell a soft coral-colored silken scarf. The costume was daring in its simplicity. She might have been Emma, Lady Hamilton, because perfectly beautiful, perfectly talented, she could risk severe simplicity, having in herself the fire and the art and the seduction. Her hair was a golden crown and her eyes like stars. She was excited, and the scarlet had run along her cheeks like wine spilled over ivory.

She looked around the room, failed to see Blair, but saw the Duchess of Breakwater in her velvet and her jewels. Letty Lane began to sing. Dan and she had chosen *Mandalay* and she began with it. Her dress only was simple. All

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the complexity of her talent, whatever she knew of seduction and charm, she put in the rendering of her song. Even the conventional audience, most of which knew her well, were enchanted over again, and they went wild about her. She had never been so charming. The men clapped her until she began in self-defense another favorite of the moment, and ended in a perfect huzzah of applause.

She refused to sing again until, in the distance, she saw Dan standing by the column near his seat. Then indicating to the pianist what she wanted, she sang *The Earl of Moray*, such a rendering of the old ballad as had not been heard in London, and coming, as it did, from the lips of a popular singer whose character and whose verve were not supposed to be sympathetic to a piece of music of this kind, the effect was startling. Letty Lane's face grew pale with the touching old tragedy, the scarlet faded from her cheeks, her eyes grew dark and moist, she might indeed herself have been the

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lady looking from the castle wall while they carried the body of her dead lover under those beautiful eyes.

Dan felt his heart grow cold. If she had awakened him when he was a little boy, she thrilled him now; he could have wept. Lady Caiwarn did wipe tears away. When the last note of the accompaniment had ended, Dan's friend at his side said: "How utterly ravishing! What a beautiful, lovely creature; how charming and how frail!"

He scarcely answered. He was making his way to Letty Lane, and he wrung her hand, murmuring, "Oh, you're great; you're great!" And the pleasure on his face repaid her over and over again. "Come, I want you to meet the Duchess of Breakwater, and some other friends of mine."

As he let her little cold hand fall and turned about, the room as by magic had cleared. The prime minister had arrived late and was in the other room. The refreshments were also being

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served. There was no one to meet Letty Lane, except for several young men who came up eagerly and asked to be presented, Gordon Galorey among them.

"Where's Lily?" Dan asked him; "I want her to meet Miss Lane."

"In the conservatory with the prime minister," and Galorey looked meaningly at Dan, as much as to say, "Now don't be an utter fool."

But Letty Lane herself saved the situation. She shook hands with the utmost cordiality and sweetness with the men who had been presented to her, and asked Dan to take her to her motor. He waited for her at the door and she came down wrapped around as usual in her filmy scarf.

"Are you better?" he asked eagerly. "You look awfully stunning, and I don't think I can ever thank you enough."

She assured him that she was "all right," and that she had a "lovely new rôle to learn and that it was coming on next month." He helped her in and she seemed to fill the motor like a basket

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of fresh white flowers. Again he repeated, as he held the door open:

"I can't thank you enough: you were a great success."

She smiled wickedly, and couldn't resist:

"Especially with the women."

Dan's face flushed; he was already deeply hurt for her, and her words showed him that the insult had gone home.

"Where are you going now?"

"Right to the Savoy."

Without another word, hatless as he was, he got into the motor and closed the door.

"I'm going to take you home," he informed her quietly, "and there's no use in looking at me like that either! When I'm set on a thing I get it!"

They rolled away in the bland sunset, passed the park, down Piccadilly, where the flowers in the streets were so sweet that they made the heart ache, and the air through the window was so sweet that it made the senses swim!

CHAPTER XVIII

A WOMAN'S WAY

WHEN the duchess thought of looking for Blair later in the afternoon he was not to be found. Galorey told her finally he had gone off in the motor with Letty Lane, bare-headed. The duchess was bidding good-by to the last guest; she motioned Galorey to wait and he did so, and they found themselves alone in the room where the flowers, still fresh, offered their silent company; the druggets strewn with leaves of smilax, the open piano with its scattered music, the dark rosewood that had served for a rest for Letty Lane's white hand. Galorey and the duchess turned their backs on the music-room, and went into a small conservatory looking out over the park.

"He's nothing but a cowboy," the lady exclaimed. "He must be quite mad, going off bareheaded through London with an actress."

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"He's spoiled," Lord Galorey said peacefully.

She carried a bunch of orchids Dan had given her, and regarded them absently. "I've made him angry, and he's taking this way of exhibiting his spleen."

Galorey said cheerfully: "Oh, Dan's got lots of spirit."

Looking up from the contemplation of her flowers to her friend, the duchess murmured with a charming smile: "I don't hit it off very well with Americans, Gordon."

His color rising, Galorey returned: "I think you'll have to let Dan go, Lily!"

For a second she thought so herself; and they both started when the voice of the young man himself was heard in the next room.

"Good-by, I'll let you make your peace, Lily," and Gordon passed Dan in the drawing-room in leaving, and thought the boy's face was a study.

The duchess held out her hand to Dan as he came across the room.

"Come here," she called agreeably. "Every

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one has gone, thank heaven! I've been waiting for you for an age. Let's talk it all over."

"Just what I've come back to do."

There had been royalty at the musicale, and the hostess spoke of her guests and their approval, mentioning one by one the names of the great. It might have impressed the ear of a man more snob than was the Montana copper king's son. "I did so want you to meet the Bishop of London," she said. "But nobody could find you. You look most awfully well, Dan," and with the orchids she held, she touched his hand.

He was so direct, so incapable of anything but the honest truth, that Dan didn't know deceit when he saw it, and his lady spoke so naturally that he thought for a moment her rudeness had been unintentional. Perhaps she hadn't really meant— Everybody in her set was rude, great and rude, but she could be deliciously gracious, and was so now.

"Don't you think it went off well?"

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Dan said that it had been ripping and no mistake.

"I like Lady Caiwarn; she's bully, and I liked the king. He spoke to me as if he had known me for a year."

She began to be a little more at her ease.

"I didn't care much for the fiddling, but Letty Lane made up for all the rest," said Dan. "Wasn't she great?"

"Ra-ther!" The duchess' tone was so warm that he asked frankly: "Well, why didn't you speak to her, Lily?" And the directness caught her unprepared. The insult to the actress by which she had planned to teach him a lesson failed to give her the bravado she found she needed to meet Dan's question. Her part of the transaction, deliberate, unkind, seemed worse and more serious through his headlong act, when he had driven off, braving her, in the motor of an actress. She didn't dare to be jealous.

"Wasn't it too dreadful?" she murmured. "Do you think she noticed it too awfully? I was just

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about to go up and speak to her when the prime minister—”

Dan interrupted the duchess. He blushed for her.

“Never mind, Lily.” His tone had in it something of benevolence. “If you really didn’t mean to be mean—”

She was enchanted by her easy victory. “It was abominable.”

“Yes,” he accepted, “it was just that! I was mortified. You wouldn’t treat a beggar so. But she’s got too much sense to care.”

Eager to do the duchess justice, even though he was little by little being emancipated, he was all the more determined to be fair to her.

“It was too sweet of her not to mind. I dare say her check helped to soothe her feelings,” the woman said.

“You don’t know her,” he replied quietly. “She wouldn’t touch a cent.”

The duchess exclaimed in horror: “Then she *did* mind.”

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And he returned slowly: "She's eaten and drunk with kings, and if the king hadn't gone so early you can bet he would have set the fashion differently. Let's drop the question. She sent you back your check, and I guess you're quits."

With a sharp note in her voice she said: "I hope it won't be in the papers that you drove bareheaded back to the hotel with her. Don't forget that we are dining with the Galoreys, and it's past seven."

After Dan had left her, the duchess glanced over the dismantled room which the servants were already restoring to order. She was not at ease and not at peace, but there was something else besides her tiff with Dan that absorbed her, and that was Galorey. She couldn't quite shake him off. He was beginning to be imperious in his demands on her; and, in spite of her cupidity and her debts, in spite of the precarious position in which she found herself with Dan, she could not break with Galorey yet. She went up-

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stairs humming under her breath the ballad
Letty Lane had sung in the music-room:

“And long will his lady look from the castle
wall.”

CHAPTER XIX

DAN AWAKES

THE next night Dan, magnetically drawn down the Strand to the Gaiety, arrived just before the close of the last act, slipped in, and sat far back watching Letty Lane close her part. After hearing her sing as she had the afternoon before in the worldly group, it was curious to see her before the public in her flashing dress and to realize how much she was a thing of the people. To-night she was a completely personal element to Dan. He could never think of her again as he had hitherto. The sharp drive through the town that afternoon in her motor had made a change in his feelings. He had been hurt for her, with anger at the Duchess of Breakwater's rudeness, and from the first he had always known that there was in him a hot cham-

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pionship for the actress. To-night, whenever the man who sang with her, put his arms around her, danced with her, held her, it was an offense to Dan Blair; it had angered him before, but to-night it did more. One by one everything faded out of his foreground but the brilliant little figure with her golden hair, her lovely face, her beautiful graceful body, and in her last gesture on the stage before the curtain went down, she seemed to Blair to call him and distinctly to make an appeal to him:

“You might rest your weary feet
If you came to Mandalay.”

Well, there was nothing weary about the young, live, vigorous American, as, standing there in his dark edge of the theater, his hands in his pockets, his bright face fixed toward the stage, he watched the slow falling of the curtain on the musical drama. Dan realized how full of vigor he was; he felt strong and capable, indeed a feeling of power often came to him delight-

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fully, but it had never been needful for him to exert his forces, he had never had need to show his mettle. Now he felt at those words:

“You might rest your weary feet”

how, with all his heart, he longed that the dancer should rest those lovely tired little feet of hers, far away from any call of the public, far away on some lovely shore which the hymn tune called the coral strand. As he gazed at her mobile, sensitive face, whose eyes had seen the world, and whose lips—Dan’s thoughts changed here with a great pang, and the close of all his meditations was: “Gosh, she ought to rest!”

The boy walked briskly back of the scenes toward the little door, behind which, as he tapped, he hoped with all his heart to hear her voice bid him come in. But there were other voices in the room. He rattled the door-knob and Letty Lane herself called to him without opening the door:

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"Will you go, please, Mr. Blair? I can't see any one to-night."

He had nothing to do but to go—to grind his heel as he turned—to swear deeply against Poniotowsky. His late ecstasy was turned to gall. The theater seemed horrible to him: the chattering of the chorus girls, their giggles, their laughter as he passed the little groups, all seemed weird and infernal, and everything became an object of irritation.

As he went blindly out of the theater he struck his arm against a piece of stage fittings and the blow was sharp and stinging, but he was glad of the hurt.

Without, in the street, Dan took his place with the other men and waited, a bitter taste in his mouth and anger in his breast, waited until Letty Lane fluttered down, followed by Poniotowsky, and the two drove away.

The young man could have gone after, running behind the motor, but there was a taxicab at hand; he jumped in it, ordering the man to

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follow the car to the Savoy. There the boy had the pleasure of seeing Miss Lane enter the hotel, Poniotowsky with her—had the anguish of seeing them both go up in the lift to her apartments.

When Dan came to himself he heard the chimes of St. Martin's ring out eleven. He then remembered for the first time that he had promised to dine alone at home with the Duchess of Breakwater.

"Gosh, Lily will be wild!"

In spite of the lateness of the hour he hurried to Park Lane. The familiar face of the man-servant who let him in blurred before the young man's eyes. Her grace was out at the theater? Blair would wait then, and he went into the small drawing-room, quiet, empty, reposeful, with a fire across the andirons, for the evening was damp and cool. Still dazed by his jealous, passionate emotions, he glanced about the room, chose a long leather sofa, and stretching out his length, fell asleep. There in the

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shadow he slept profoundly, waking suddenly to find that he was not alone. Across the room the Duchess of Breakwater stood by the table; she was in evening dress, her cloak and gloves on the chair at her side. She laughed softly and the man to whom she laughed, on whom she smiled, was Lord Galorey.

Blair raised himself up on the sofa without making any noise, and he saw Galorey take the woman in his arms. The sight didn't make the fiancé angry. He realized instantly that he *wanted to believe that it was true*, and as there was nothing theatrical in the young Westerner, he sprang up, slang so much a part of his nature that the first words that came to his lips was a phrase in vogue.

"Look who's here!" he cried, and came blithely forward, his head clear, his lips smiling.

The duchess gave a little scream and Dan lounged up to the two people and held his hand frankly out to the lady.

"That's all right, Lily! Go right on, Gordon,

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please. Only I had to let you know when I waked up! Only fair. I guess I must have been asleep quite a while."

The Duchess of Breakwater shrugged. "I don't know what you dreamed," she said acidly, "if you were asleep."

"Well, it was a very pretty dream," the boy returned, "and showed what a stupid ass I've been to think I couldn't have dreamed it when I was awake."

"I think you are crazy," the duchess exclaimed.

But Blair repeated: "That's all right. I mean to say as far as I am concerned—"

And Galorey, in order to stand by his lady, murmured:

"My dear chap, you *have* been dreaming."

But Blair met the Englishman's gray eyes with his blue ones. "I did have a bottle of champagne, Gordon, that's a fact, but it couldn't make me see what I did see."

"Dan," the Duchess of Breakwater broke in,

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"let Gordon take you home, like a dear. You're really ragging on in a ridiculous way."

Blair looked at her steadily, and as he did so he repeated:

"That's all right, Lily. Gordon cares a lot, and the truth of the matter is that I *do not*."

She grew very pale.

"I would have stuck to my word, of course," he went on, "but we'd have been infernally unhappy and ended up in the divorce courts. Now, this little scene here of yours lets me out, and I don't lay it up against either of you."

"Gordon!" she appealed to her lover, "why, in Heaven's name, don't you speak!"

The Englishman realized that while he was glad at heart, he regretted that he had been the means of her losing the chance of her life.

"What do you want me to say, Lily?" he exclaimed with a desperate gesture. "I can't tell him I don't love you. I have loved you, God help me, for ten years."

She could have killed him for it.

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"I can tell you, Dan, if you want me to," Galorey went on, "that I don't believe she cares a penny for any one on the face of the earth, for you or me."

Old Dan Blair's son showed his business training. His one idea was to "get out," and as he didn't care who the Duchess of Breakwater loved or didn't love, he wanted to break away as fast as he could. He sat down at the table under the light of the lamp and drew out his wallet with its compact, thick little check book, the millionaire's pass to most of the things that he wants.

"You've taught me a lot," he said to the Duchess of Breakwater, "and my father sent me over here for that. I have been awfully fond of you, too. I thought I was fonder than I am, I guess. At any rate I want to stand by one of my promises. That old place of yours—Stainer Court—now that's got to be fixed up."

He made a few computations on paper, lifted the pad to her with the figures on it, round, generous and full.

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"At home," he said, "in Blairtown, we have what we call 'engagement' parties, when each fellow brings a present to the girl, but this is what we might call a 'broken engagement party.' Now, I can't," the boy went on, "give this money to you very well; it won't look right. We will have to fix that up some way or other. You will have to say you got an unexpected inheritance from some uncle in Australia." He smiled at Galorey: "We will fix it up together."

His candor, his simplicity, were so charming, he stood before the two so young, so clear, so clean, that a sudden tenderness for him, and a sense of what she had lost, what she never had had, made her exclaim:

"Dan, I really don't care a pin for the money—I don't"—but the hand she held out was seized by the other man and held fast. Galorey said:

"Very well, let it go at that. You don't care for the money, but you will take it just the same. Now, don't, for God's sake, tell him that you care for him."

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He made her meet his eyes this time: stronger than she, Galorey forced her to be sincere. She set Dan free and he turned and left them standing there facing each other. He softly crossed the room, and looking back, he saw them, tall, distinguished, both of them under the lamplight—enemies, and yet the closest friends bound by the strongest tie in the world.

As Dan went out through the curtains of the room and they fell behind him, the Duchess of Breakwater sank down in the chair by the side of the table; she buried her face. Gordon Galorey bent over her and again took her in his arms, and she suffered it.

CHAPTER XX

A HAND CLASP

IT WAS one o'clock. Blair called a hansom and told the driver to take him to the Carlton, and leaning back in the vehicle he breathed a long sigh. He looked like his father, but he didn't know it. He felt old. He was a man and a tired one and a free one, and the sense of this liberty began to refresh him like a breeze over parched sand. He thought over what he had left for a second, stopped longest in pitying Galorey, then went into the Carlton restaurant to order some supper, for he began to feel the need of food. He had not time to drink his wine and partake of the cold pheasant before he saw that opposite him the two people who had taken their table were Letty Lane and Poniotowsky. The woman's slender back was turned

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to Blair, and his heart gave a leap of pain at the sight of the man with her, and the cruel suffering began again.

Dan gave up the idea of eating: drank a whole bottle of champagne, then pushed it away from him violently. "Hold up," he told himself, "you're getting dangerous; this drinking won't do." So he sat drumming on the table looking into the air. When those two got up to go, however, he would go with them; that was sure. He could never see them go out together again; no—no—no! As his brain grew a bit clearer he saw that they were having a heated discussion between them, and as the room emptied finally, save for themselves, Dan, though he could not hear what Poniotowsky said, understood that he was urging something which the girl did not wish to grant. When they left he rose as well, and at the door of the restaurant the actress and her companion paused, and Dan saw her face, deadly pale. There were tears in her eyes.

"For God's sake!" he heard her murmur, and

A HAND CLASP

she impatiently drew her cloak around her shoulders. Poniotowsky put out his hand to help her, but she drew back from him, exclaiming violently: "Oh, no—no!" Before he was aware what he was doing, Dan was holding his hand out to Miss Lane.

How she turned to him! God of dreams! How she took in one cold hand his hand; just the grasp a man needs to lead him to offer the service of his life. Her hand was icy—it thrilled him to his marrow.

"Oh—you—" she breathed. "Hello!"

No words could have been more commonplace, less in the category of dramatic or poetic welcome, but they were music to the boy, and when the actress looked at him with a ghost of a smile on her trembling lips, Dan was sure there was some kind of blessing in the greeting.

"I am going to see you home," he said with determination, and she caught at it:

"Yes, yes, do! Will you?"

The third member of the party had not

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spoken. A servant fetched him a light to which he bent, touching his cigar. Then he lifted his head—a handsome one—with its cold and indifferent eyes, to Letty Lane.

“Good night, Miss Lane.” A deep color crept under his dark skin.

“Come,” said the actress eagerly, “come along; my motor is out there and I am crazy tired. That is all there is about it. Come along.”

Snatched from a marriage contract, still bitter from his jealous anger, this—to be alone with her—by the side of this white, fragrant, wonderful creature—to have been turned to by her, to be alone with her, the Duchess of Breakwater out of his horizon, Poniotowsky gone—Oh, it was sweet to him! They had rolled out from the Carlton down toward the Square and he put his arm around her waist, his voice shook:

“You are dead tired! And when I saw that brute with you to-night I could have shot him.”

“Take your arm away, please.”

A HAND CLASP

"Why?"

"Take it away. I don't like it. Let my hand go. What's the matter with you? I thought I could trust you."

He said humbly: "You can—certainly you can."

"I am tired—tired—tired!"

Under his breath he said: "Put your head on my shoulder, Letty, darling."

And she turned on him nearly as violently as she had on Poniotowsky, and burst into tears, crouching almost in the corner of the motor, away from him, both her hands upon her breast.

"Oh, can't you see how you bother me? Can't you see I want to rest and be all alone? You are like them all—like them all. Can't I rest anywhere?"

The very words she used were those he had thought of when he saw her dance at the theater, and his heart broke within him.

"You can," he stammered, "rest right here. God knows I want you to rest more than any-

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thing. I won't touch you or breathe again or do anything you don't want me to."

She covered her face with her hands and sat so without speaking to him. The light in her motor shone over her like a kindly star, as, wrapped in her filmy things she lay, a white rose blown into a sheltered nook. After a little she wiped her eyes and said more naturally:

"You look perfectly dreadfully, boy! What have you been doing with yourself?"

They had reached the Savoy. It seemed to Dan they were always just driving up to where some one opened a door, out of which she was to fly away from him. He got out before her and helped her from the car.

"Well, I've got a piece of news to tell you. I have broken my engagement with the duchess."

This brought her back far enough into life to make her exclaim: "Oh, I *am* glad! That's perfectly fine! I don't know when I've heard anything that pleased me so much. Come and see me to-morrow and tell me all about it."

CHAPTER XXI

RUGGLES RETURNS

DAN did not fall asleep until morning, and then he dreamed of Blairtown and the church and a summer evening and something like the drone of the flies on the window-pane soothed him, and came into his waking thoughts, for at noon he was violently shaken by the shoulder and a man's voice called him as he opened his eyes and looked into Ruggles' face.

"Gee Whittaker!" Ruggles exclaimed. "You *are* one of the seven sleepers! I've been here something like seventeen minutes, whistling and making all kinds of barnyard noises."

As Dan welcomed him, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Ruggles told him that he had come over "the pond" just for the wedding.

"There isn't going to be any wedding, Josh! Got out of all that last night."

Ruggles had the breakfast card in his hand,

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which the waiter had brought in, and Dan, taking it from his friend, ordered a big breakfast.

"I'm as hungry as the dickens, Rug, and I guess you are, too."

"What was the matter with the duchess?" Ruggles asked. "Were you too young for her, or not rich enough?"

Significantly the boy answered: "One too many, Josh," and Ruggles winced at the response.

"Here are the fellows with my trunks and things," he announced as the porters came in with his luggage. "Just drop them there, boys; they're going to fix some kind of a room later."

Blair's long silk-lined coat lay on a chair where he had flung it, his hat beside it, and Ruggles went over to the corner and lifted up a fragrant glove. It was one of Letty Lane's gloves which Dan had found in the motor and taken possession of. The young man had gone to his dressing-room and begun running his bath, and Ruggles, laying the glove on the table, said to himself:

RUGGLES RETURNS

"I knew he would get rid of the duchess, all right."

But when Dan came back into the room later in his dressing-gown for breakfast, Ruggles said:

"You'll have to send her back her glove, Dannie."

At the sight of it beside the breakfast tray, Dan blushed scarlet. He picked up the fragrant object.

"That's all right; I'll take care of it."

"Is *Mandalay* running the same as ever?" Ruggles asked over his bacon and eggs.

"Same as ever."

Ruggles saw he had not returned in vain, and that he was destined to take up his part of the business just as he had laid it out for himself to Lord Galorey. "It's up to me now: I'll have to take care of the actress, and I'm darned if I haven't got a job. If Dan colors up like that at the sight of her glove, I wonder what he does when he holds her hand!"

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT WILL YOU TAKE?

WHEN Dan, on the minute of two, went to the Savoy, Higgins, as was her custom, did not meet him. Miss Lane met him herself. She was reading a letter by the table, and when Dan was announced she put it back in its envelope. Blair had seen her only in soft clinging evening dresses, in white visionary clothes, or in her dazzling part costume, where the play dress of the dancer displayed her beauty and her charms. To-day she wore a tailor-made gown, and in her dark cloth dress, in her small hat, she seemed a new woman—some one he hadn't known and did not know, and he experienced the thrill a man always feels when the woman he loves appears in an unaccustomed dress and suggests a new mystery.

“Oh, I say! You're not going out, are you?”

WHAT WILL YOU TAKE?

In the lapel of her close little coat was a flower he had given her. He wanted to lean forward and kiss it as it rested there. She assured him:

"I have just come in; had an early lunch and took a long walk—think of it! I haven't taken a walk alone since I can remember!"

Her walk had given her only the ghost of a flush, which rose over her delicate skin, fading away like a furling flag. Her frailness, her slenderness, the air of good-breeding her dress gave her, added to Dan's deepening emotions. She seemed infinitely dear, and a thing to be protected and fostered.

"Can't you sit down for a minute? I've come to make you a real call."

"Of course," she laughed. "But, first, I must answer this letter."

His jealousy rose and he caught hold of her hand that held the envelope. "Look here, you are not to write it if it is to that damned scoundrel. I took you away from him last night and you are never to see him again."

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For the first time the two really looked at each other. Her lips parted as though she would reprove him, and the boy murmured:

“That’s all right. I mean what I say—never to see him again! Will you promise me? Promise me—I can’t bear it! I won’t have it!”

A film of emotion crossed his clear young eyes and her slender hands were held fast in his clasp. His face was beautiful in its tenderness and in a righteous anger as he bent it on her. Instead of reproving him as she had done before, instead of snatching away her hands, she swayed, and at the sight of her weakness his eyes cleared, and the film lifted like a curtain. She was not fainting, but, as her face turned toward his, he saw it transformed, and Dan caught her in her dark dress, the flowers in her bodice, to his heart. He held her as if he had snatched her from a wreck and in a safe embrace lifted her high to the shore of a coral strand. He kissed her, first timidly, wonderingly, with the sacrament of first love on his lips. Then he kissed her as his heart

WHAT WILL YOU TAKE?

bade him, and when he set her free she was crying, but the tears on his face were not all her tears.

"Little boy, how crazy, how perfectly crazy! Oh, Dan—Dan!"

She clung to him, looking up at him just as his boy-dreams had told him a girl *would* look some day. Her face was suffused and softened, her lips—her coral-red, fine, lovely lips were trembling, and her eyes were as gray, as profound as those seas his imagination had longed to explore. Made poet for the first time in his life, as his arms were around her, he whispered: "You are all my dreams come true. If any man comes near you I'll kill him just as sure as fate. I'll kill him!"

"Hush, hush! I told you you were crazy. We're both perfectly mad. I have tried my best not to come to this with you. What would your father say? Let me go, let me go; I'll call Higgins."

The boy laughed aloud, the laugh of happy

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youth. He held her so close that she might as well have tried to loose herself from an iron image of the Spanish Inquisition as from his young arms. This slender, delicious, willowy thing he held was Letty Lane, the adored star London went mad over: the triumph of it! It flashed through him as his pulses beat and his heart was high with the conquest, but it was to the woman only that he whispered:

"I've said a lot of stuff and I am likely to say a lot more, but I want you to say something to me. *Don't you love me?*"

The word on his lips to him was as strange, as wonderful, as though it had been made for him.

"I guess I must love you, Dan. I guess I must have for a long time."

"God, I'm so glad! How long?"

"Why, ever since you used to come to the soda fountain and ask for chocolate. You don't know how sweet you were when you were a little boy."

She put her slender hand against his hot

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cheek. "And you are nothing but a little boy now! I think I must be crazy!"

As he protested, as she listened intently to what his emotion taught him to say to her, she whispered close to his ear:

"What will *you* take, little boy?"

And he answered: "I'll take you—you!"

At a slight sound in the next room Letty Lane started as though the interruption really brought her to her senses, put her hand to her disheveled hair, and before she could prevent it, Dan had called Mrs Higgins to "come in," and the woman, in response, came into the sitting-room. The boy went up to her and took her hands eagerly, and said:

"It's all right, all right, Mrs. Higgins. Just think of it! She belongs to me!"

"Oh, don't be a perfect lunatic, Dan," the actress exclaimed, half laughing, half crying, "and don't listen to him, Higgins. He's just crazy."

But the old woman's eyes went bright at the

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boy's face and tone. "I never was so glad of anything in my life."

"As of what?" asked her mistress sharply, and the tone was so cold and so suddenly altered that Dan felt a chill of despair.

"Why, at what Mr. Blair says, Miss."

"Then," said her mistress, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. He's only twenty-two, he doesn't know anything about life. You must be crazy. He's as mad as a March hare and he ought to be in school."

Then, to their consternation, she burst into a passion of weeping; threw herself on Higgins' breast and begged her to send Dan away—to send everybody away—and to let her die in peace.

In utter despair the boy obeyed the dresser's motion to go, and his transport was changed into anxiety and dread. He hung about downstairs in the Savoy for the rest of the afternoon, finally sending up to Higgins for news in sheer desperation, and the page fetched Blair a note

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in Letty Lane's own hand. His eyes blurred so as he opened the sheet, he could hardly read the scrawl which said:

“It was perfectly sweet of you to wait down there. I'm all right—just tired out! Better get on a boat and go to Greenland's Icy Mountains and cool off. But if you don't, come in tomorrow and have lunch with me. **LETTY.**”

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE SUNSET GLOW

HE LIVED through a week of bliss and of torture. One minute she promised to marry him, give up the stage, go around the world on a yacht, whose luxuries, Dan planned, should rival any boat ever built, or they would motor across Asia and see, one by one, the various coral strands and the golden sands of the East. He could not find terms to express how he would spend upon her this fortune of his, which, for the first time, began to have value in his eyes. Money had been lavished on her, still she seemed dazzled. Then she would push it all away from her in disgust—tell him she was sick of everything—that she didn't want any new jewels or any new clothes, and that she never wanted to see the stage again or any place

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again; that there was nowhere she wanted to go, nothing she wanted to see—that he must get some fresh girl to whom he could show life, not one whom he must try to make forget it. Then, again, she would say that she loved the stage and her art—wouldn't give it up for any one in the world—that it was fatal to marry an actress—that it was mad for him to think of marrying her, anyway—that she didn't want to marry any one and be tied down—that she wanted to be her own mistress and free.

He found her a creature of a thousand whims and caprices, quick to cry, quick to laugh, divine in everything she did. He never knew what she would want him to do next, or how her mood would change, and after one of their happiest hours, when she had been like a girl with him, she would burst into tears, beg him to leave the room, telling him that she was tired—tired—tired, and wanted to go to sleep and never to wake up again. Between them was the figure of Poniotowsky, though neither spoke

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of him. She appeared to have forgotten him. Dan would rather have cut out his tongue than to speak his name, and yet he was there in the mind of each. During the fortnight Dan spent thousands of pounds on her, bought her jewels which she alternately raved over or but half looked at. He had made his arrangements with Galorey peacefully, coolly and between the two men it had been understood that the world should think the engagement broken by the duchess, and Dan's attention to Letty Lane, already the subject of much comment, already conspicuous, was enough to justify any woman in taking offense.

One day, the pearl of warm May days, when England even in springtime touches summer, Blair was so happy as to persuade his sweetheart to go with him for a little row on the river. The young fellow waited for her in the boat he had secured, and she, motoring out with Higgins, had appeared, running down to the edge of the water like a girl, gay as a child let out

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from school, in a simple frock, in a marvelously fetching hat, white gloves, white parasol, white shoes, and as Dan helped her into the boat, pushed it out, pushed away with her on the crest of the sun-flecked waters, spring was in his heart, and he found the moment almost too great to bear.

The actress had been a girl with him all day, giving herself to his moods, doing what he liked without demur, talking of their mutual past, telling him one amusing story after another, proving herself an ideal companion, fresh, varied, reposeful; and no one to have seen Letty Lane with the boy on that afternoon would have dreamed that she ever had known another love. They had moored their boat down near Maidenhead, and he had helped her up the bank to the little inn, where tea had been made for them, and served to him by her own beautiful white hands. He had called for strawberries, and, like a shepherd in a pastoral, had fed them to her, and as they lingered the sunset came

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creeping steadily in through the windows where they sat.

As they neither called for their account nor to have the tea things taken away, after a while the woman stealthily opened the door and, unknown, looked at one of the prettiest pictures ever within her walls. Letty Lane sat on the window-seat, her golden head, her white form against the glow, and the boy by her side had his arms around her, and her head was on his breast. They were both young. They might have been white birds blown in there, nesting in the humble inn, and the woman of the house, who had not heard the waters of the Thames flow softly for nothing, judged them gently and sighed with pleasure as she shut the door.

Here at Maidenhead Dan had left his boat and the motor took them back. Nothing spoiled his bliss that day, and he said her name a thousand times that night in his dreams. Jealousies—and, when he would let himself think, they were not one, they were many—faded away. The

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duties that a life with her would involve did not disturb him. For many a long year, come what might, be what would, he would recall the glowing of that sunset reflected under the inn windows, the singing of the thrushes and the flash of the white dress and the fine little white shoes which he had held in the palm of his ardent hand, which he had kissed, as he told her with all his heart that she should rest her tired feet for ever.

There grew in him that day a reverence for her, determined as he was to bring into her life by his wealth and devotion everything of good. His loving plans for her forming in his brain somewhat chaotic and very much fevered, brought him nearer than he had ever been before to the picture of his mother. His father it wasn't easy for Dan to think of in connection with the actress. He didn't dare to dwell on the subject, but he had never known his mother, and that pale ideal he could create as he would. In thinking of her he saw only tenderness for

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Letty Lane—only love; and in his room the night after the row on the river, the night after the long idyl in the sunset-room of the inn, something like a prayer came to his young lips, and, when its short form was finished, a smile brought it to an end as he remembered the line in Letty Lane's own opera:

“She will teach you how to pray in an Eastern form of prayer.”

The ring he had given the Duchess of Breakwater had been her own choice, a ruby. He had asked her, through Galorey, to keep it and to wear it later, when she could think of him kindly, in an ornament of some kind or another. The duchess had not refused. The ring he bought for Letty Lane, although there was no engagement announced between them, was the largest, purest diamond he could *with decency* ask her to put on her hand! It sparkled like a great drop of clear water from some fountain on a magic continent. In another shop strands of

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pink coral set through with diamonds caught his fancy and he bought her yards of them, ropes of them, smiling to think how his boyhood's dreams were come true.

He never saw Ruggles except at meals, hardly spoke to the poor man at all, and the boy's absorbed face, his state of mind, made the older man feel like death. He repeated to himself that he was too late—too late, and usually wound up his reflections by ejaculating:

“Gosh almighty, I’m glad I haven’t got a son!”

CHAPTER XXIV

RUGGLES' OFFER

HE FELT as he waited for her in that flower-filled room, for she had recovered from her distaste for flowers, as he glanced at the photographs of women like herself in costumes more or less frank, more or less vulgar, he felt as though he wanted to knock down the walls and let in a big view of the West—of Montana—of the hills. With such a setting he thought he could better talk with the lady whom he had come to see.

Ruggles held an unlighted cigar between his fingers and goose-flesh rose all over him. His glasses bothered him. He couldn't get them bright enough, though he polished them half a dozen times on his silk handkerchief. His clothes felt too large. He seemed to have shrunk. He

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moistened his lips, cleared his throat, tried to remember what kind of fellow he had been at Dan's age. At Dan's age he was selling a suspender patent on the road, supporting his mother and his sisters—hard work and few temptations; he was too tired and too poor.

Miss Lane kept him waiting ten minutes, and they were hours to her guest. He was afraid every minute that Dan would come in. The thoughts he had gathered together, the plan of action, disarranged itself in his mind every time he thought of the actress. He couldn't forget his vision of her on the stage or at the Carlton, where she had sat opposite them and bewitched them both. When she came into the sitting-room at length, he started so violently that he knocked over a vase of flowers, the water trickling all over the table down on to the floor.

She had dazzled him before the footlights, charmed him at dinner, and it was singular to think that he knew how this dignified, quiet creature looked in ballet clothes and in a dinner

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dress, whose frankness had made him catch his breath. It was a third woman who stood before Ruggles now. He had to take her into consideration. She had expected him, saw him by appointment. She was a woman of mind and intelligence. She had not climbed to her starry position without having acquired a knowledge of men, and it was the secret of her success. She showed it in the dress in which she received her visitor. She wore a short walking skirt of heavy serge, a simple shirtwaist belted around, a sailor hat on her beautiful little head. She was unjeweled and unpainted, very pale and very sweet. If it had not been for the marks of fatigue under her eyes, she would not have looked more than eighteen. On her left hand a single diamond, clear as water, caught the refracted light.

"How-de-do? Glad you are back again."

She gave him a big chair and sat down before him smiling. Leaning her elbows on her knees, she sank her face upon her hands and looked at him, not coquettishly in the least, but as a child



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might have looked. From her small feet to her golden head she was utterly charming.

Ruggles made himself think of Dan. Miss Lane spoke slowly, nodding toward him, in her languid voice: "It's no use, Mr. Ruggles, no use."

Holding her face between her hands, her eyes gray as winter's seas and as profound, she looked at him intently; then, in a flash, she changed her position and instantly transformed her character. He saw that she was a woman, not an eighteen-year-old girl, but a woman, clever, poised, witty, understanding, and that she might have been twenty years older than the boy.

"I'm sorry you spoke so quick," he said.

"I knew," she interrupted, "just what you wanted to say from the start. I couldn't help it, could I? I knew you would want to come and see me about it. It isn't any use. I know just what you are going to say."

"No, ma'am," he returned, "I don't believe you do—bright as you are."

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Ruggles gazed thoughtfully at the cold end of his unlighted cigar. It was a comfort to him to hold it and to look at it, although not for anything in the world would he have asked to light it.

"Dan's father and me were chums. We went through pretty much together, and I know how he felt on most points. He was a man of few words, but I know he counted on me to stand by the boy."

Ruggles was so chivalrous that his rôle at present cost him keen discomfort.

"A lady like you," he said gently, "knows a great deal more about how things are done than either Dan or me. We ain't tenderfeet in the West, not by a long shot, but we see so few of a certain kind of picture shows that when they do come round they're likely to make us lose our minds! You know, yourself, a circus in a town fifty miles from a railroad drives the people crazy. Now, Dan's a little like the boy with his eyes on the hole in the tent. He would commit

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murder to get inside and see that show." He nodded and smiled to her as though he expected her to follow his crude simile. "Now, I have seen *you* a lot of times." And she couldn't help reminding him, "Not of your own accord, Mr. Ruggles."

"Well, I don't know," he slowly admitted; "I always felt I had my money's worth, and the night you ate with us at the Carlton I understood pretty well how the boy with his eyes at the tent hole would feel." But he tapped his broad chest with the hand that held the cigar between the first and second fingers. "I know just what kind of a heart you've got, for I waited at the stage door and I know you don't get all your applause inside the Gaiety Theater."

"Goodness," she murmured, "they make an awful fuss about nothing."

"Now," he continued, leaning forward a trifle toward her languid, half interested figure, "I just want you to think of him as a little boy.

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He's only twenty-two. He knows nothing of the world. The money you give to the poor doesn't come so hard perhaps as this will. It's a big sacrifice, but I want you to let the boy go."

She smiled slightly, found her handkerchief, which was tucked up the cuff of her blouse, pressed the little bit of linen to her lips as though to steady them, then she asked abruptly:

"What has he said to you?"

"Lord!" Ruggles groaned. "*Said* to me! My dear young lady, he is much too rude to speak. Dan sort of breathes and snorts around like a lunatic. He was dangling around that duchess when I was here before, but she didn't scare me any."

And Letty Lane, now smiling at him, relieved by his break from a more intense tone, asked:

"Now, you are scared?"

"Well," Ruggles drawled, "I was pretty sure that woman didn't *care* anything for the boy. Are you her kind?"

It was the best stroke he had made. She almost sprang up from her chair.

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"Heavens," she exclaimed, "I guess I'm not!" Her face flushed.

"I had rather see a son of mine dead than married to a woman like that," he said.

"Why, Mr. Ruggles," she exclaimed passionately, addressing him with interest for the first time, "what do you know about me? What? What? You have seen me dance and heard me sing."

And he interrupted her.

"Ten times, and you are a bully dancer and a bully singer, but you do other things than dance and sing. There is not a man living that would want to have his mother dress that way."

She controlled a smile. "Never mind that. People's opinions are very different about that sort of thing. You have seen me at dinner with your boy, as you call him, and you can't say that I did anything but ask him to help the poor. I haven't led Dan on. I have tried to show him just what you are making me go through now."

If she acted well and danced well, it was hard for her to talk. She was evidently under strong

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emotion and it needed her control not to burst into tears and lose her chance.

"Of course, I know the things you have heard. Of course, I know what is said about me"—and she stopped.

Ruggles didn't press her any further; he didn't ask her if the things were true. Looking at her as he did, watching her as he did, there was in him a feeling so new, so troubling that he found himself more anxious to protect her than to bring her to justice.

"There are worse, far worse women than I am, Mr. Ruggles. I will never do Dan any harm."

Here her visitor leaned forward and put one of his big hands lightly over one of hers, patted it a moment, and said:

"I want you to do a great deal better than that."

She had picked up a photograph off the table, a pretty picture of herself in *Mandalay*, and turned it nervously between her fingers as she said with irritation:

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"I haven't been in the theatrical world not to guess at this 'Worried Father' act, Mr. Ruggles. I told you I knew just what you were going to say."

"Wrong!" he repeated. "The business is old enough perhaps, lots of good jobs are old, but *this* is a little different."

He took the turning picture and laid it on the table, and quietly possessed himself of the small cold hands. Blair's solitaire shone up to him. Ruggles looked into Letty Lane's eyes. "He is only twenty-two; it ain't fair, it ain't fair. He could count the times he has been on a lark, I guess. He hasn't even been to an eastern college. He is no fool, but he's darned simple."

She smiled faintly. The man's face, near her own, was very simple indeed.

"You have seen so much," he urged, "so many fellows. You have been such a queen, I dare say you could get any man you wanted." He repeated. "Most any one."

"I have never seen any one like Dan."

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"Just so: he ain't your kind. That is what I am trying to tell you."

She withdrew her hand from his violently.

"There you are wrong. He *is* my kind. He is what I like, and he is what I want to be like."

A wave of red dyed her face, and, in a tone more passionate than she had ever used to her lover, she said to Ruggles:

"I love him—I love him!" Her words sent something like a sword through the older man's heart. He said gently: "Don't say it. He don't know what love means yet."

He wanted to tell her that the girl Dan married should be the kind of woman his mother was, but Ruggles couldn't bring himself to say the words. Now, as he sat near her, he was growing so complex that his brain was turning round. He heard her murmur:

"I told you I knew your act, Mr. Ruggles. It isn't any use."

This brought him back to his position and once more he leaned toward her and, in a differ-

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ent tone from the one he had intended to use, murmured:

"You don't know. You haven't any idea. I do ask you to let Dan go, that's a fact. I have got something else to propose in its place. It ain't quite the same, but it is clear—marry me!"

She gave a little exclamation. A slight smile rippled over her face like the sunset across a pale pool at dawn.

"Laugh," he said humbly; "don't keep in. I know I am old-fashioned as the deuce, and me and Dan is quite a contrast, but I mean just what I say, my dear."

She controlled her amusement, if it was that. It almost made her cry with mirth, and she couldn't help it. Between laughing breaths she said to him:

"Oh, is it all for Dan's sake, Mr. Ruggles? Is it?" And then, biting her lips and looking at him out of her wonderful eyes, she said: "I know it is—I know it is—I beg your pardon."

"I asked a girl once when I was poor—too

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poor. Now this is the second time in my life. I mean just what I say. I'll make you a kind husband. I am fifty-five, hale as a nut. I dare say you have had many better offers."

"Oh, dear," she breathed; "oh, dear, please—please stop!"

"But I don't expect you to marry me for anything but my money."

Ruggles put his cigar down on the edge of the table. He looked at his chair meditatively, he took out his silk handkerchief, polished up his glasses, readjusted them, put them on and then looked at her.

"Now," he said, "I am going to trust you with something, and I know you will keep my secret for me. This shows you a little bit of what I think about you. Dan Blair hasn't got a red cent. He has nothing but what I give him. There's a false title to all that land on the Bentley claim. The whole thing came up when I was home and the original company, of which I own three-quarters of the stock, holds the clear titles

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to the Blairtown mines. It all belongs now to me, if I choose to present my documents. Dan knows nothing about this—not a word.”

The actress had never come up to such a dramatic point in any of her plays. With her hands folded in her lap she looked at him steadily, and he could not understand the expression that crossed her face. He heard her exclamation: “Oh, gracious!”

“I’ve brought the papers back with me,” said the Westerner, “and it is between you and me how we act. If Dan marries you I will be bound to do what old Blair would have done—cut him off—let him feel his feet on the ground, and the result of his own folly.”

He had taken his glasses off while he made this assertion. Now he put them on again.

“If you give him up I’ll divide with the boy and be rich enough still to hand over to my wife all she wants to spend.”

She turned her face away from him and leaned her head once more upon her hands. He

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heard her softly murmuring under her breath, with an absent look on her face, accompanied by a still more incomprehensible smile.

"That's how it stands," he concluded.

She seemed to have forgotten him entirely, and he caught his breath when she turned about abruptly and said:

"My goodness, how Dan will hate being poor! He will have to sell all his stickpins and his motor cars and all the things he has given me. It will be quite a little to start on, but he will hate it, he is so very smart."

"Why, you don't mean to say—" Ruggles gasped.

And with a charming smile as she rose to put their conversation at an end, she said:

"Why, you don't mean to say that you thought I *wouldn't stand by him?*" She seemed, as she put her hands upon her hips with something of a defiant look at the older man, as though she just then stood by her pauperized lover.

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"I thought you cared some for the boy," Ruggles said.

"Well, I am showing it."

"You want to ruin him to show it, do you?"

As though he thought the subject dismissed he walked heavily toward the door.

"You know how it stands. I have nothing more to say." He knew that he had signally failed, and as a sudden resentment rose in him he exclaimed, almost brutally:

"I am darned glad the old man is dead; I am glad his mother's dead, and I am glad I have got no son."

The next moment she was at his side, and he felt that she clung to his arm. Her sensitive, beautiful face, all drawn with emotion, was raised to his.

"Oh, you'll kill me—you'll kill me! Just look how very ill I am; you are making me crazy. I just worship him."

"Give him up, then," said Ruggles steadily.

She faltered: "I can't—I can't—it won't be

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for long"—with a terrible pathos in her voice. "You don't know how different I can be: you don't know what a new life we were going to lead."

Stammering, and with intense meaning, Ruggles, looking down at her, said: "My dear child—my dear child!"

In his few words something perhaps made her see in a flash her past and what the question really was. She dropped Ruggles' arm. She stood for a moment with her arms folded across her breast, her head bent down, and the man at the door waited, feeling that Dan's whole life was in the balance of the moment. When she spoke again her voice was hard and entirely devoid of the lovely appealing quality which brought her so much admiration from the public.

"If I give him up," she said slowly, "what will you do?"

"Why," he answered, "I'll divide with Dan and let things stand just as they are."

She thought again a moment and then as if

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she did not want him to witness—to detect the struggle she was going through, she turned away and walked over toward the window and dismissed him from there. “Please go, will you? I want very much to be alone and to think.”

CHAPTER XXV

LETTY LANE RUNS AWAY

HE HAD not got up-stairs to his rooms at the Carlton before a note was handed him from the actress, bidding him to return at once to the Savoy, and Ruggles, his heart hammering like a trip-hammer, rushed up to his rooms, made an evening toilet, for it was then half-past seven, threw his cravats and collars all around the place, cursed like a miner as he got into his clothes, and red almost to apoplexy, nervous and full of emotion, he returned to the rooms he had left not three hours before.

The three hours had been busy ones at the actress' apartment. Letty Lane's sitting-room was full of trunks, dressing-bags and traveling paraphernalia. She came forward out of what seemed a world of confusion, dressed as though

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for a journey, even her veil and her gloves denoting her departure. She spoke hurriedly and almost without politeness.

"I have sent for you to come and see me here. Not a soul in London knows I am going away. There will be a dreadful row at the theater, but that's none of your affairs. Now, I want you to tell me before I go just what you are going to do for Dan."

"Who are you going with?" Ruggles asked shortly, and she flashed at him:

"Well, really, I don't think that is any of your business. When you drive a woman as you have driven me, she will go far."

He interrupted her vehemently, not daring to take her hand. "I couldn't do more. I have asked you to marry me. I couldn't do more. I stand by what I have said. Will you?" he stammered.

She knew men. She looked at him keenly. Her veil was lifted above her eyes and its shadow framed her small pale face on which there

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were marks of utter disenchantment, of great ennui. She said languidly: "What I want to know is, what you are going to do for Dan?"

"I told you I would share with him."

"Then he will be nearly as rich?"

"He'll have more than is good for him."

That satisfied her. Then she pursued: "I want you to stand by him. He will need you."

Ruggles lifted the hand he held and kissed it reverently. "I'll do anything you say—anything you say."

Down-stairs in the Savoy, as Dan had done countless times, Ruggles waited until he saw her motor car carry her and her small luggage and Higgins away.

In their sitting-room in the Carlton a half-hour later the door was thrown open and Dan Blair came in like a madman. Without preamble he seized Ruggles by the arm.

"Look here," he cried, "what have you been doing? Tell me now, and tell me the truth, or, by God, I don't know what I'll do. You went to

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the Savoy. You went there twice. Anyhow, where is she?"

Dan, slender as he was beside Ruggles' great frame, shook the elder man as though he had been a terrier. "Speak to me. Where has she gone?"

He stared in the Westerner's face, his eyes bloodshot. "Why in thunder don't you say something?"

And Ruggles prayed for some power to unloose his thickening tongue.

"You say she's gone?" he questioned.

"I say," said the boy, "that you've been meddling in my affairs with the woman I love. I don't know what you have said to her, but it's only your age that keeps me from striking you. Don't you know," he cried, "that you are spoiling my life? Don't you know that?" A torrent of feeling coming to his lips, his eyes suffused, the tears rolled down his face. He walked away into his own room, remained there a few moments, and when he came out again he carried in

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his hand his valise, which he put down with a bang on the table. More calmly, but still in great anger, he said to his father's friend:

"Now, can you tell me what you've done or not?"

"Dan," said Ruggles with difficulty, "if you will sit down a moment we can—"

The boy laughed in his face. "Sit down!" he cried. "Why, I think you must have lost your reason. I have chartered a motor car out there and the damned thing has burst a tire and they are fixing it up for me. It will be ready in about two minutes and then I am going to follow wherever she has gone. She crossed to Paris, but I can get there before she can even with this damned accident. But, before I go, I want you to tell me what you said."

"Why," said Ruggles quietly, "I told her you were poor, and she turned you down."

His words were faint.

"God!" said the boy under his breath. "That's the way you think about truth. Lie to a woman

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to save my precious soul! But I expect," he said; "you think she is so immoral and so bad that she will hurt me. Well," he said, with great emphasis, "she has never done anything in her life that comes up to what you've done. Never! And nothing has ever hurt me so."

His lips trembled. "I have lost my respect for you, for my father's friend, and as far as she is concerned, I don't care what she marries me for. She has got to marry me, and if she doesn't"—he had no idea, in his passion, what he was saying or how—"why, I think I'll kill you first and then blow my own brains out!" And with these mad words he grabbed up his valise and bolted from the room, and Ruggles could hear his running feet tearing down the corridor.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHITE AND CORAL

SPRING in Paris, which comes in a fashion so divine that even the most calloused and indifferent are impressed by its beauty, awakened no answering response in the heart of the young man who, from his hotel window, looked out on the desecrated gardens of the Tuileries—on the distant spires of the churches whose names he did not know—on the square block of old palaces. He had missed the boat across the Channel taken by Letty Lane, and the delay had made him lose what little trace of her he had. In the early hours of the morning he had flung himself in at the St. James, taken the indifferent room they could give him in the crowded season, and excited as he was he slept and did not waken until noon. Blair thought it would be a matter

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of a few hours only to find the whereabouts of the celebrated actress, but it was not such an easy job. He had not guessed that she might be traveling incognita, and at none of the hotels could he hear news of her, nor did he pass her in the crowded, noisy, rustling, crying streets, though he searched motors for her with eager eyes, and haunted restaurants and cafés, and went everywhere that he thought she might be likely to be.

At the end of the third day, unsuccessful and in despair, having hardly slept and scarcely eaten, the unhappy young lover found himself taking a slight luncheon in the little restaurant known as the Perouse down on the Quais. His head on his hand, for the present moment the joy of life gone from him, he looked out through the windows at the Seine, at the bridge and the lines of flowering trees. He was the only occupant of the upper room where, of late, he had ordered his luncheon.

The tide of life rolled slowly in this quieter

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part of the city, and as Blair sat there under the window there passed a piper playing a shrill, sweet tune. It was so different from any of the loud metropolitan clamors, with which his ears were full, that he got up, walked to the window and leaned out. It was a pastoral that met his eyes. A man piping, followed by little pattering goats; the primitive, unlooked-for picture caught his tired attention, and, just then, opposite the Quais, two women passed—flower sellers, their baskets bright with crocuses and giroflés. The bright picture touched him and something of the springlike beauty that the day wore and that dwelt in the May light, soothed him as nothing had for many hours.

He paid his bill, took courage, picked up his hat and gloves and stick and walked out briskly, crossing the bridge to the Rue de Rivoli, determined that night should not fall until he found the woman he sought. Nor did it, though the afternoon wore on and Dan, pursuing his old trails, wandered from worldly meeting place to

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worldly meeting place. Finally, toward six o'clock, he saw the lengthening shadows steal into the woods of the Bois de Boulogne, and in one of the smaller alleys, where the green-trunked trees of the forests were full of purple shadows and yellow sun discs, flickering down, he picked up a small iron chair and sat himself down, with a long sigh, to rest.

While he sat there watching the end of the *allée* as it gave out into the broader road, a beautiful red motor rolled up to the conjunction of the two ways and Letty Lane, in a summer frock, got out alone. She had a flowing white veil around her head and a flowing white scarf around her shoulders. As the day on the Thames, she was all in white—like a dove. But this time her costume was made vivid and picturesque by the coral parasol she carried, a pair of coral-colored kid shoes, around her neck and falling on their long chain, she wore his coral beads. He saw that he observed her before she did him. All this Dan saw before he dashed

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into the road, came up to her with something like a cry on his lips, bareheaded, for his hat and his stick and his gloves were by his chair in the woods.

Letty Lane's hands went to her heart and her face took on a deadly pallor. She did not seem glad to see him. Out of his passionate description of the hours that he had been through, of how he had looked for her, of what he thought and wanted and felt, the actress made what she could, listening to him as they both stood there under the shadows of the green trees. Scanning her face for some sign that she loved him, for it was all he cared for, Dan saw no such indication there. He finished with:

"You know what Ruggles told you was a lie. Of course, I've got money enough to give you everything you want. He's a lunatic and ought to be shut up."

"It may have been a lie, all right," she said with forced indifference; "I've had time to think it over. You are too young. You don't know

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what you want." She stopped his protestations: "Well, then, *I* am too old and I don't want to be tied down."

When he pressed her to tell him whether or not she had ceased to care for him, she shook her head slowly, marking on the ground fine tracery with the end of her coral parasol. He had been obliged to take her back to the red motor, but before they were in earshot of her servants, he said:

"Now, you know just what you have done to me, you and Ruggles between you. For my father's sake and the things I believed in I've kept pretty straight as things go." He nodded at her with boyish egotism, throwing all the blame on her. "I want you to understand that from now, right now, I'm going to the dogs just as fast as I can get there, and it won't be a very gratifying result to anybody that ever cared."

She saw the determination on his fine young face, worn by his sleepless nights, already matured and changed, and she believed him.

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"Paris," he nodded toward the gate of the woods which opened upon Paris, "is the place to begin in—right here. A man," he went on, and his lips trembled, "can only feel like this once in his life. You know all the talk there is about young love and first love. Well, that's what I've got for you, and I'm going to turn it now—right now—into just what older people warn men from, and do their best to prevent. I have seen enough of Paris," he went on, "these days I have been looking for you, to know where to go and what to do, and I am setting off for it now."

She touched his arm.

"No," she murmured. "No, boy, you are not going to do any such thing!"

This much from her was enough for him. He caught her hand and cried: "Then you marry me. What do we care for anybody else in the world?"

"Go back and get your hat and stick and gloves," she commanded, keeping down the tears.

"No, no, you come with me, Letty; I'm not

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going to let you run to your motor and escape me again."

"Go; I'll wait here," she promised. "I give you my word."

As he snatched up the inanimate objects from the leaf-strewn ground where he had thrown them in despair, he thought how things can change in a quarter of an hour. For he had hope now, as he hurried back, as he walked with her to her car, as he saw the little coral shoes stir in the leaves when she passed under the trees. The little coral shoes trod on his heart, but now it was light under her feet!

Jubilant to have overcome the fate which had tried to keep her hidden from him in Paris, he could hardly believe his eyes that she was before them again, and, as the motor rolled into the Avenue des Acacias, he asked her the question uppermost in his mind:

"Are you alone in Paris, Letty?"

"Don't you count?"

"No—no—honestly, *you know what I mean.*"

THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN

"You haven't any right to ask me that."

"I have—I have. You gave me a right. You're engaged to me, aren't you? Gosh, you haven't *forgotten*, have you?"

"Don't make me conspicuous in the Bois, Dan," she said; "I only let you come with me because you were so terribly desperate, so ridiculous."

"Are you alone?" he persisted. "I have got to know."

"Higgins is with me."

"Oh, God," he cried wildly, "how can you joke with me? Don't you understand you're breaking my heart?"

But she did not dare to be kind to him, knowing it would unnerve her for the part she had promised to play.

He sat gripping his hands tightly together, his lips white. "When I leave you now," he said brokenly, "I am going to find that devil of a Hungarian and do him up. Then I am going to tackle Ruggles."

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"Why, what's poor Mr. Ruggles got to do with it?"

Dan cried scornfully: "For God's sake, don't keep this up! You know the rot he told you? I made him confess. He has had this mania all along about money being a handicap; he was bent on trying this game with some girl to see how it worked." He continued more passionately. "I don't care a rap what you marry me for, Letty, or what you have done or been. I think you're perfect and I'll make you the happiest woman in the world."

She said: "Hush, hush! Listen, dear; listen, little boy. I am awfully sorry, but it won't do. I never thought it would. You'll get over it all right, though you don't, you can't believe me now. I can't be poor, you know; I really couldn't be poor."

He interrupted roughly: "Who says you'll be? What are you talking about? Why, I'll cover you with jewels, sweetheart, if I have to rip the earth open to get them out."

THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN

She understood that Dan believed Ruggles' story to have been a cock-and-bull one.

"You talk as though you could buy me, Dan. Wait, listen." She put him back from her. "Now, if you won't be quiet, I'm going to stop my car."

He repeated: "Tell me, are you alone in Paris? Tell me. For three days I have wandered and searched for you everywhere; I have hardly eaten a thing, I don't believe I have slept a wink." And he told her of his weary search.

She listened to him, part of the time her white-gloved hand giving itself up to the boy; part of the time both hands folded together and away from him, her arms crossed on her breast, her small shoes of coral kid tapping the floor of the car. Thus they rolled leisurely along the road by the Bois. Through the green-trunked trees the sunlight fell divinely. On the lake the swans swam, pluming their feathers; there were children there in their ribbons and furbelows. The whole world went by gay and careless, while for

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Dan the problem of his existence, his possibility for happiness or pain was comprised within the little room of the motor car.

"Are you alone in Paris, Letty?"

And she said: "Oh, what a bore you are! You're the most obstinate creature. Well, I am alone, but that has nothing to do with you."

A glorious light broke over his face; his relief was tremendous.

"Oh, thank God!" he breathed.

"Poniotowsky"—and she said his name with difficulty—"is coming to-night from Carlsbad."

The boy threw back his bright head and laughed wildly.

"Curse him! The very name makes me want to commit a crime. He will go over my body to you. You hear me, Letty. I mean what I say."

People had already remarked them as they passed. The actress was too well known to pass unobserved, but she was indifferent to their curiosity or to the existence of any one but this excited boy.

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Blair, who had not opened a paper since he came to Paris, did not know that Letty Lane's flight from London had created a scandal in the theatrical world, that her manager was suing her, and that to be seen with her driving in the Bois was a conspicuous thing indeed. She thought of it, however.

"I am going to tell the man to drive you to the gate on the other side of the park where it's quieter, we won't be stared at, and then I want you to leave me and let me go to the Meurice alone. You must, Dan, you must let me go to the hotel alone."

He laughed again in the same strained fashion and forced her hand to remain in his.

"Look here. You don't suppose I am going to let you go like this, now that I have seen you again. You don't suppose I am going to give you up to that infamous scoundrel? You have got to marry me."

Bringing all her strength of character to bear, she exclaimed: "I expect you think you are the

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only person who has asked me to marry him, Dan. I am going to *marry* Prince Poniotowsky. He is perfectly crazy about me."

Until that moment she had not made him think that she was indifferent to him, and the idea that such a thing was possible, was too much for his overstrained heart to bear. Dan cried her name in a voice whose appeal was like a hurt creature's, and as the hurt creature in its suffering sometimes springs upon its torturer, he flung his arms around her as she sat in the motor, held her and kissed her, then set her free, and as the motor flew along, tore open the door to spring out or to throw himself out, but clinging to him she prevented his mad act. She stopped the car along the edge of the quiet, wooded *allée*. Blair saw that he had terrified her. She covered her beating heart with her hands and gasped at him that he was "crazy, crazy," and perhaps a little late his dignity and self-possession returned.

"I am mad," he acknowledged more calmly,

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“and I am sorry that I frightened you. But you drive me mad.”

Without further word he got out and left her agitated, leaning toward him, and Blair, less pale and thoroughly the man, lifted his hat to her and, with unusual grace, bowed good night and good-by. Then, rushing as he had come, he walked off down through the *allée*, his gray figure in his gray clothes disappearing through the vista of meeting trees.

For a moment she stared after him, her eyes fastened on the tall slender beautiful young man. Blair's fire and ardor, his fresh youthfulness, his protection and his chivalry, his ardent devotion, touched her profoundly. Tears fell, and one splashed on her white glove. Was he really going to ruin his life? The old ballad, *The Earl of Moray*, ran through her head:

“And long may his lady look from the castle wall.”

Dan had neither title nor, according to Rug-

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gles, had he any money, and she could marry the prince; but Dan, as he walked so fast away, merrily snapping at his heels as he went, stamping through the woods, seemed glorious to Letty Lane and the only one she wanted in the world. What if anything should happen to him really? What if he should really start out to do the town according to the fashion of his Anglo-Saxon brothers, but more desperately still? She took a card from the case in the corner of the car, scribbled a few words, told the man to drive around the curve and meet the outlet of the path by which Dan had gone. When she saw him within reaching distance she sent the chauffeur across the woods to give Mr. Blair her scribbled word and consoled herself with the belief that Dan wouldn't "go to the dogs or throw himself in the river until he had seen her again."

CHAPTER XXVII

AT MAXIM'S

AT THE Meurice, Miss Lane gave strict orders to admit only Mr. Blair to her apartments. She described him. No sooner had she drunk her cup of tea, which Higgins gave her, than she began to expect Dan.

He didn't come.

Her dinner, without much appetite, she ate alone in her salon; saw a doctor and made him prescribe something for the cough that racked her chest; looked out to the warm, bright gardens of the Tuileries fading into the pallid loveliness of sunset, indifferent to everything in the world—except Dan Blair. She believed she would soon be indifferent to him, too; then everything would be done with. Now she wondered had he really gone—had he done what he threat-

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ened? Why didn't he come? At twelve o'clock that night, as she lay among the cushions of her sofa, dozing, the door of her parlor was pushed in. She sprang up with a cry of delight; but when Poniotowsky came up to her she exclaimed:

"Oh, you!" And the languor and boredom with which she said his name made the prince laugh shortly.

"Yes, I. Who did you think it was?" Cynically and rather cruelly he looked down at Letty Lane and admired the picture she made: small, exquisite, her blond head against the dark velvet of the lounge, her gray eyes intensified by the fatigue under them.

"Just got in from Carlsbad; came directly here. How-de-do? You look, you know—" he scrutinized her through his single eye-glass—"most frightfully seedy."

"Oh, I'm all right." She left the sofa, for she wanted to prevent his nearer approach. "Have you had any supper? I'll call Higgins."

THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN

"No, no, sit down, please, will you? I want to know why you sent to Carlsbad for me? Have you come to your senses?"

He was as mad about the beautiful creature as a man of his temperament could be. Exhausted by excess and bored with life, she charmed and amused him, and in order to have her with him always, to be master of her caprices, he was willing to make any sacrifice.

"Have you sent off that imbecile boy?" And at her look he stopped and shrugged. "You need a rest, my child," he murmured practically, "you're neurasthenic and very ill. I've wired to have the yacht at Cherbourg—It'll reach there by noon to-morrow."

She was standing listlessly by the table. A mass of letters sent by special messenger from London after her, telegrams and cards lay there in a pile. Looking down at the lot, she murmured: "All right, I don't care."

He concealed his triumph, but before the look

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had faded from his face she saw it and exclaimed sharply:

"Don't be crazy about it, you know. You'll have to pay high for me; you know what I mean."

He answered gallantly: "My dear child, I've told you that you would be the most charming princess in Hungary."

Once more she accepted indifferently: "All right, all right, I don't care tuppence—not tuppence"—and she snapped her fingers; "but I like to see you pay, Frederigo. Take me to Maxim's."

He demurred, saying she was far too ill, but she turned from him to call Higgins, determined to go if she had to go alone, and said to him violently: "Don't think I'll make your life easy for you, Frederigo. I'll make it wretched; as wretched—" and she held out her fragile arms, and the sleeves fell back, leaving them bare—"as wretched as I am myself."

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But she was lovely, and he said harshly: "Get yourself dressed. I'll go change and meet you at the lift."

She made him take a table in the corner, where she sat in the shadow on the sofa, overlooking the brilliant room. Maxim's was no new scene to either of them, no novelty. Poniotowsky scarcely glanced at the crowd, preferring to feast his eyes on his companion, whose indifference to him made his abstraction easy. She was his property. He would give her his title; she had demanded it from the first. The Hungarian was a little overdressed, with his jeweled buttons, his large *boutonnière*, his faultless clothes, his single eye-glass through which he stared at Letty Lane, whose delicate beauty was in fine play: her cheeks faintly pink, her starry eyes humid with a dew whose luster is of the most precious quality. Her unshed tears had nothing to do with Poniotowsky—they were for the boy. Her heart sickened, thinking where he might be; and

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more than that, it cried out for him. She wanted him.

Oh, she would have been far better for Dan than anything he could find in this mad city, than anything to which in his despair he would go for consolation. She had kept her word, however, to that old man, Mr. Ruggles; she had got out of the business with a fatal result, as far as the boy was concerned. She thought Dan would drift here probably as most 'Americans on their wild nights do for a part of the time, and she had come to see.

She wore a dress of coral pink, tightly fitting, high to her little chin, and seemed herself like a coral strand from neck to toe, clad in the color she affected, and which had become celebrated as the Letty Lane pink. Her feathered hat hid her face, and she was completely shielded as she bent down drawing pictures with her bare finger on the cloth. After a little while she said to Poniotowsky without glancing at him:

"If you stare any longer like that, Frederigo,

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you'll break your eye-glass. You know how I hate it."

Used as he was to her sharpness, he nevertheless flushed and sat back and looked across the room, where, to their right, protected from them as they were from him by the great door, a young man sat alone. Whether or not he had come to Maxim's intending to join a congenial party, should he find one, or to choose for a companion some one of the women who, at the entrance of the tall blond boy, stirred and invited him with their raised lorgnons and their smiles, will not be known. Dan Blair was alone, pale as the pictures Letty Lane had drawn on the cloth, and he, too, feasted his eyes on the Gaiety girl.

"By Jove!" said the Hungarian under his breath, and she eagerly asked: "What? Whom? Whom do you see?"

Turning his back sharply he evaded her question and she did not pursue the idea, and as a physical weakness overwhelmed her, when Ponio-

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towsky after a second said, "Come, *chérie*, for heaven's sake, let's go"—she mechanically rose and passed out.

Several young men supping together came over eagerly to speak to her and claim acquaintance with the Gaiety girl, and walked along out to the motor. There Letty Lane discovered she had dropped her handkerchief, and sent the prince back for it.

As though he had been waiting for the reappearance of Poniotowsky, Dan Blair stood close to the little table which Letty Lane had left, her handkerchief in his hand. As Poniotowsky came up Dan thrust the small trifle of sheer linen into his waistcoat pocket.

"I will trouble you for Miss Lane's handkerchief," said Poniotowsky, his eyes cold.

"You may," said Dan as quietly, his blue eyes like sparks from a star, "trouble me for hell!" And lifting from the table Poniotowsky's own half-emptied glass of champagne, the boy flung the contents full in the Hungarian's face.

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The wine dashed against Poniotowsky's lips and in his eyes. Blair laughed out loud, his hands in his pockets. The insult was low and noiseless; the little glass shattered as it fell so softly that with the music its gentle crash was unheard.

Poniotowsky wiped his face tranquilly and bowed.

"You shall hear from me after I have taken Miss Lane home."

"Tell her," said the boy, "where you left the handkerchief, that's all."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS

DAN was in his room at the hotel. He woke and then slept again. Nothing seemed strange to him—nothing seemed real. It was three o'clock in the morning, the rumble of Paris was dull; it did not disturb him, for he seemed without the body and to have grown giantlike, and to fill the room. He had a sense of suffocation and the need to break through the windows and to escape into ether.

The entrance of Poniotowsky's two friends was a part with the unreal naturalness. One was a Roumanian, the other a Frenchman—both spoke fluent English. Dan, his eyes fixed on the foreign faces, only half saw them; they blurred, their voices were small and far away. Finally he said:

"All right, all right, I can shoot well enough;

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this kind of thing isn't our custom, you know—I'd as soon kill him one way as another, as a matter of fact. No, I don't know a darned soul here." There was a confab incomprehensible to Dan. "It's all one to me, gentlemen," he said. "I'd rather not drag in my friends, anyhow. Fix it up to suit yourselves."

He wanted them to go—to be alone—to stretch his arms, to rid himself of the burden of sense, and be free. And after they had left, he remained in his window till dawn. It came soon, midsummer dawn, a singularly tender morning in his heart. His mind worked with great rapidity. He had made his will in the States. He wished he could have left everything to Letty Lane, but if, as Ruggles said, he was a pauper? Perhaps it wasn't a lie after all. Dan had written and telegraphed Ruggles asking for the solemn truth, and also telling him where he was and asking the older man to come over. If Ruggles proved he was poor, why, some of his burden was gone. His money had been a bur-

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den, he knew it now. He might have no use for money the next day. What good could it do him in a fix like this? He was to meet Peniotowsky at five o'clock in a place whose name he couldn't recall. He had seen it advertised, though; people went there for lunch.

They were to shoot at twenty-five paces—he might be a Rockefeller or a beggar for all the good his money could do him in a pinch like this.

His father wouldn't approve, the old man wouldn't approve, but he had sent him here to learn the ways of the old world. A flickering smile crossed his beautiful, set face. His lessons hadn't done him much good; he would like to have seen good old Gordon Galorey again; he loved him—he had no use for Ruggles, no use—it had been all his fault. His mind reached out to his father, and the old man's words came dining back: "Buy the things that stay above ground, my boy." What were those things? He had thought they were passion—he had thought they were love, and he had put all on

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one woman. She couldn't stand by him, now that he was poor.

The spasm in his heart was so sharp that he made a low sound in his throat and leaned against the casing of the window. He must see her, touch her once more.

The fellows Poniotowsky's seconds had chosen to be Dan's representatives came in to "fix him up." They were in frock-coats and carried their silk hats and their gloves. He could have laughed at them. Then they made him think of undertakers, and his blood grew cold. He handled the revolvers with care and interest.

"I'm not going to let him murder me, you know," he told his seconds.

They helped him dress, at least one of them did, while the other took Dan's place by the window and looked to the boy like a figure of death.

The hour was getting on; he heard his own motor drive up, and they went down, through the deserted hotel. The men who had consented

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to act for Dan regarded their principal curiously. He wasn't pale, there was a brightness on his face.

"*Partons,*" said one of them, and told Blair's chauffeur where to go and how to run. "*Partons.*"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PICTURE OF IT ALL

AS far as his knowing anything of the customs of it all, it was like leading a lamb to slaughter.

Villebon, lovely, vernal, at a later hour the spot for gay breakfasts and gentle rendezvous, had been designated for the meeting between Dan and Poniotowsky. There in his motor he gave up his effort to set his thoughts clear. Nothing settled down. Even the ground they flew over, the trees with their chestnut plumes, blurred, were indistinct, nebulous, as if seen through a diving-bell under the sea. Fear—he didn't know the word. He wasn't afraid—it wasn't that; yet he had a certainty that it was all up with him. He was young—very young—and he hadn't done much with the job. His

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father would have been ashamed of him. Then all his thoughts went to Her. The two men in the motor floated off and she sat there as she had sat yesterday in her marvelously pretty clothes—her little coral shoes.

He had held those bright, little feet in his hand on the Thames day: they had just filled his great hands. Mechanically he spread out his firm, broad palms on the soft shoes. Letty Lane—Letty Lane—a shiver passed through his body; the sense of her, the touch of her, the kisses he had taken, the way she had blown up against him like a cloud—a cloud that, as he held her, became the substance of Paradise. This brought him back to physical life, brutally. He was too young to die.

Those little, red shoes would dance on his grave. Was she asleep now? How would she know? What would she know?

Then Letty Lane, too, spirited away, and the boy's thoughts turned to the man he was to meet. "The affairs are purely formal," he had

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heard some one say, "an exchange of balls, without serious results."

One of his companions offered Blair a cigar. He refused, the idea sickened him. Here the gentlemen exchanged glances, and one murmured, "Is he afraid?"

The other shrugged.

"Not astonishing—he's a child."

At this Dan glanced up and smiled—what Lily, Duchess of Breakwater, had called his divine young smile. The two secretly were ashamed—he was charming.

As they got out of the motor Dan said:

"I want to ask a question of Prince Poniotowsky—if it is allowed. I'll write it on my card."

After a conference between Prince Poniotowsky's seconds and Dan's, the slip was handed the prince.

"If you get out all right, will you marry Miss Lane? I shall be glad to know."

THE PICTURE OF IT ALL

The Hungarian, who read it under the tree, half smiled. The naïveté of it, the touching youth of it, the crude lack of form—was perfect enough to touch his sense of humor. On the back of Dan's card Poniotowsky scrawled:

"Yes."

It was a haughty inclination, a salute of honor before the fight.

The meeting place was within sight of the little rustic pavilion of Les Trois Agneaux, celebrated for its *pré salé* and *beignets*: the advertisements had confronted Dan everywhere during his wanderings those miserable days. Under a group of chestnut trees in bright feathery flower Prince Poniotowsky and his seconds waited, their frock-coats buttoned up and their gloves and silk hats in their hands. As Blair and his companions came up the others stood uncovered, grim and formal, according to the code.

On the highroad a short distance away ranged the motors which had fetched the gentlemen

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from Paris, and the car in which the physician had come—an ugly and sinister gathering in the peace and beauty of the serene summer morning.

Finches and thrushes sang in the bushes, over the grass the dew still hung in crystals, and a peasant walking at his horses' heads on the slow tramp back from the Paris market, was held up and kept stolidly waiting at a few hundred yards away.

Twenty-five paces. They were measured off by the four seconds, and at their signal Dan Blair and the prince took their positions, the revolvers raised perpendicularly in their right hands.

Still more indistinctly the boy saw the sharp-cut picture of it all . . . the diving-bell was sinking deeper—deeper—into the sea.

"If I aim," he said to himself, "I shall kill sure—sure."

Blair heard the command: "Fire!" and supposed that after that he fired.

CHAPTER XXX

SODAWATER FOUNTAIN GIRL

HIS next sensation was that a warm stream flowed about his heart.

“My life’s blood,” he could dimly think, “my heart’s blood.” Redder than coral, more precious, more costly than any gift his millions could have bought her. “I’ve spent it for the girl I love.” The stream pervaded him, caressed him, folded his limbs about, became an enchanted sea on which he floated, and its color changed from crimson to coral pale, and then to white, and became a cold, cold polar sea—and he lay on it like a frozen man, whose exploration had been in vain, and above him Greenland’s icy mountains rose like emerald, on every side.

That is it—“Greenland’s icy mountains.”

THE GIRL FROM HIS TOWN

How she sang it—down—down. Her voice fell on him like magic balm. He was a little boy in church, sitting small and shy in the pew. The tune was deep and low and heavenly sweet. What a pretty mouth the soda-fountain girl had—like coral; and her eyes like gray seas. The flies buzzed, they droned so loudly that he couldn't hear her. Ah, that was terrible—*he couldn't hear her.*

No—no, it wouldn't do. He must hear the hymn out before he died. Buzz—buzz—drone—drone. Way down he almost heard the soft note. It was ecstasy. Sky—high up—too faint. Ah, Sodawater Fountain Girl—sing—sing—with all your heart so that it may reach his ears and charm him to those strands toward which he floats.

The expression of anguish on the young fellow's face was so heartbreaking that the doctor, his ear at Dan's lips, tried to learn what thing his poor, fading mind longed for.

SODAWATER FOUNTAIN GIRL

From the bed's foot, where he stood, Dan's chauffeur came to his gentleman's side, and nodded:

"Right, sir, right, sir—I'll fetch Miss Lane—I'll 'ave 'er 'ere, sir—keep up, Mr. Blair."

He was going barefoot, a boy still following the plow through the mountain fields. Miles and miles stretched away before him of dark, loamy land. He saw the plow tear up the waving furrows, tossing the earth in sprinkling lines. He heard the shrill note of the phœbe bird, and looking heavenward saw it darting into the pale sky.

"What a dandy shot!" he thought. "What a bully shot!"

Prince Poniotowsky had made a good shot. . . .

Ah, there was the smell of the hayfields—no—violets that sweetly laid their petals on his lips and face. He was back again in church, lying prone before an altar. If she would only

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sing, he would rise again—that he knew—and her coral shoes would not dance over his grave.

He opened his eyes wide and looked into Letty Lane's. She bent over him, crying.

"Sing," he whispered.

She didn't understand.

"Sodawater Fountain Girl—if you only knew how . . . the flies buzzed, and how the droning was a living pain. . . ."

She said to Ruggles: "He wants something so heartbreakingly—what can we do?" She saw his hands stir rhythmically on the counterpane—he didn't look to her more than ten years old. . . . What a cruel thing—he was a boy just of age—a boy—

Ruggles remembered the nights he had spent before the footlights of the Gaiety, and that the pale woman trembling there weeping was a great singer.

"I guess he wants to hear you sing."

She knelt down by him; she trembled so she couldn't stand.

The others, the doctor and Ruggles, the wait-

SODAWATER FOUNTAIN GIRL

ers and porters gathered in the hall, heard. No one of them understood the Gaiety girl's English words.

“From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strands . . .”

They were merciful and let him listen in peace. Through the blur in his brain, over the beat of his young ardent heart, above the short breaths the notes reached his failing senses, and lifted him—lifted him. There wasn't a very long distance between his boyhood and his twenty-two years to go, and he was not so weak but that he could travel so far.

He sat there by his father again—and heard. The flies buzzed, and he didn't mind them. The smell of the fields came in through the windows and the Sodawater Fountain Girl sang—and sang; and as she sang her face grew holy to his eyes—radiant with a beauty he had not dreamed a woman's face could wear. Above the choir rail she stood and sang peerlessly, and the church

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began to fade and fade, and still she stood there in a shaft of light, and her face was like an angel's, and she held her arms out to him as the waters rose to his lips. She bent and lifted him—lifted him high upon the strands. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI

IN REALITY

DAN awoke from his dream, and sat suddenly up in bed in his shirt sleeves, and stared at the people in his room,—a hotel boy and two strangers, not unlike the men in his dream. He brushed his hand across his eyes.

“Sit down, will you? Do you speak English?”

They were foreigners, but they did speak English, no doubt far more perfectly than did Dan Blair.

“Look here,” the boy said, “I don’t know what’s the matter with me—I must have had a ripping jag on last night—let me put my head in a basin of water, will you?”

He dived into the dressing-room, and came out in another second, his blond head wet,

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wiping his face and hair furiously with a towel. He hadn't beamed as he did now on these two strange men—for weeks.

"Well," he asked slowly, "I expect you've come to ask me to fight with Prince Poniotowsky—yes? It's against our principles, you know, in the States—we don't do that way. Personally, I'd throw anything at him I could lay my hands on, but I don't care to have him let daylight through me, and I don't care to kill your friend. See? I'm an American—yes, I know, I know," he nodded sagely, "but we don't have your kind of fights out our way. It means business when we go out to shoot."

He threw the towel down on the table, soaking wet as it was, put his hands in the pockets of his evening clothes, which he still wore, for he had not undressed, threw his young, blond head back and frankly told his visitors:

"I'm not up on swords. I've seen them in pictures and read about them, but I'll be darned if I've ever had one in my hand."

IN REALITY.

His expression changed at the quiet response of Poniotowsky's seconds.

"*Gee*. Whew!" he exclaimed, "he does, does he? Twenty paces—revolvers—why, he's a bird—a bird!"

A slight flush rose along Dan's cheeks. "I never liked him, and you don't want to hear what I think of him. But I'll be darned if he isn't a bird."

His eyes caught sight of a blue envelope on the table. He tore the telegram open. It was Ruggles' answer to his question:

"Quite true. Tell you about it. Arrive your hotel around noon."

The despatch informed him that he was really a pauper and also that he had a second for his duel with Poniotowsky. His guests stood formally before the young barbarian.

"Look here," he continued amiably, "I can't meet your Dago friend like this, it's not fair. He hasn't seen me shoot; it isn't for me to say

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it, but I can't miss. Hold," he interrupted, "he has, too. He was at the Galoreys' at that first shoot. Ah—well, I refuse, tell him so, will you? Tell him I'm an American and a cowboy and that for me a duel at twenty paces with a pistol would mean murder. I like his pluck—it's all right—tell him anything you like. He ought to have chosen swords. He would have had me there."

They retired as formally as they had entered, and took his answer to their client, and after a bath and careful toilet Dan went out, leaving a line for Ruggles, to say that he would be at the hotel to meet him at noon.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PRINCE ACCEPTS

THE Hungarian, in the Continental, was drinking his coffee in his room when his friends found him. He listened to what they had to say coolly. His eye-glass gave him an air of full dress even at this early hour. Poniotowsky had not fallen into a deep sleep and had a dream as Dan Blair had—indeed he had only reached his rooms the night before when a letter had been brought him from Miss Lane. He was used to her caprices, which were countless, and he never left her with any certainty that he should see her again, or with any idea of what her next move would be. The letter read:

“It’s no use. I just can’t. I’ve always told you so, and I mean it. I’m tired out—I want to go away and never see any one again. I

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want to die. I shall be dead next year, and I don't care. Please leave me alone and don't come to see me, and for heaven's sake don't bore me with notes."

When Poniotowsky received this note he had shrugged, and decided that if he lived after his duel with the young savage he would go to see the actress, taking a jewel or a gift—he would get her a Pomeranian dog, and all would be well. He listened coolly to what his friends had to say.

"*C'est un enfant*," one of them remarked sneeringly.

"In my mind, he is a coward," said the other.

"On the contrary," answered Poniotowsky coolly, "he shoots to perfection. You will be surprised to hear that I admire his refusal. I accept his decision, as his skill is unquestioned with arms. I choose to look upon this reply as an apology. I would like to have you inform Mr. Blair of this fact. He's young enough to

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be my son, and he is a barbarian. The incident is closed."

He put Letty Lane's note in his pocket, and leisurely prepared to go out on the Rue de Castiglione to buy her a Pomeranian dog.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE THINGS ABOVE GROUND

HIGGINS let him in, and across the room Blair saw the figure of the actress against the light of the long window. Her back was to him as he came up, and though she knew who it was, she was far from dreaming how different a man it was that came in to see her this morning from the one she had known.

"Won't you turn around and bid me good-by?" he asked her. "I'm going away."

She gave him a languid hand without looking at him.

"Has Higgins gone?"

"Yes. Won't you turn round and say how-de-do, and good-by? Gosh," he cried as she turned, "how pale you are, darling." And he took her in his arms.

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The vision he had had of her in her coral-colored dress at Maxim's gave place to the more radiant one which had shone on him in his curious dream.

"Are you very ill?" he murmured. "Speak to me—tell me—are you going to die?"

"Don't be a goose, boy."

"I've had a wire from Ruggles," Dan said; "he tells me it's true. I have nothing but my own feet to stand on, and I'm as poor as Job's turkey." Looking at her impressively, he added, "I only mind because it will be hard on you."

"Hard on me?"

"Yes, you'll have to start poor. Mother did with father, out there in Montana. It will be rough at first, but others have done it and been happy, and we've got each other." The eyes fixed on her were as blue as the summer skies. "Money's a darned poor thing to buy happiness with, Letty. It didn't buy me a thing fit to keep, that's the truth. I've never been so gay

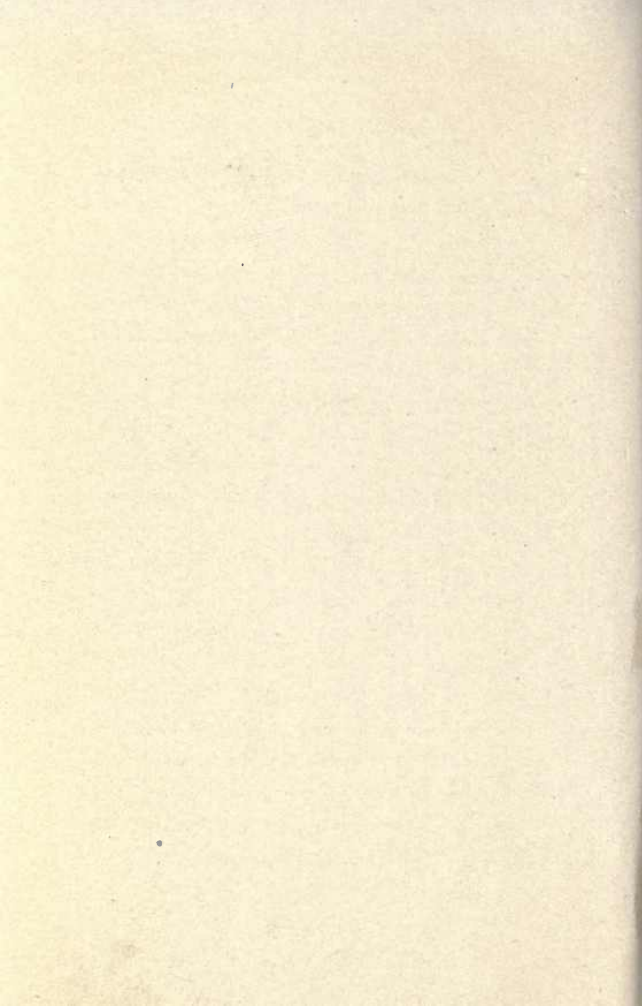
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since I was born as I am to-day. Why, I feel," he said, and would have stretched out his arms, only he held her with them, "like a king. Later I'll have money again, all right—don't fret—and then I'll know its worth. I'll bet you weren't all unhappy there in Blairtown before you turned the heads of all those Johnnies." He put one hand against her cheek and lifted her drooping head. "Lean on me, sweetheart," he said with great tenderness. "It will be all right."

A coral color stole along her cheek: it rose like a sweet tide under his hand. She looked at him, fascinated.

"It's not a real tragedy," he went on. "I've got my letter of credit, and old Ruggles will let me hang on to that, and you'll find the motor cars and jewels will look like thirty cents when we stand in the door of our little shack and look out at the Value Mine." He lifted her hand to his lips, held it there, and the spark ignited in her; his youth and confidence, his force and





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passion, woke a woman in Letty Lane that had never lived before that hour.

He murmured: "I'll be there with you, darling—night and day—night and day!" He brought his bright face close to hers.

She found breath to say, "What has happened to you, Dan—what?"

"I don't know," he gravely replied. "I guess I came up pretty close against it last night; things got into their right places, and then and there I knew you were the girl for me, and I the man for you, rich or poor."

He kissed her and she passively received his caresses, so passively, so without making him any sign, that his magnificent assurance began to be shaken—his arms fell from her.

"It's quite true," he murmured, "I am poor."

She led him to the lounge and made him sit down by her. He waited for her to speak, but she remained silent, her eyes fixed on her frail hands, ringless—tears forced themselves under her eyelids, but she kept them back.

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"I guess," she said in a veiled tone, "you've no idea all I've been through, Dan, since I stood there in the church choir."

American though he was, and down on foreign customs—he wouldn't fight a duel—he got down on his knees and put his arms around her from there.

"I know what you are, all right, Letty. You are an angel."

She gave way and burst into tears and hid her face on his shoulder, and sobbed.

"I believe you do—I believe you do. You've saved my soul and my life. I'll go with you—I'll go—I'll go!"

Later she told him how she would learn to cook and sew, and that together they would stand in the door of their shack at sunset, or that she would stand and watch for him to come home; and, the actress in her strong, she sprang up for a minute and stood shielding her eyes with her slender hand to show him how. And

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he gazed, charmed at her, and drew her back to him again.

"You've made dad's words come true." Dan wouldn't tell her what they were—he said she wouldn't understand. "I nearly had to die to learn them myself," he said.

She leaned toward him, a slight shadow crossed her face as if memories laid a darkling wing for a moment there. Such shadows must have passed, for she kissed him of her own accord on the lips and without a sigh.

Side by side they sat for a long time. Higgins softly opened a door, saw them, and stepped back, unheard.

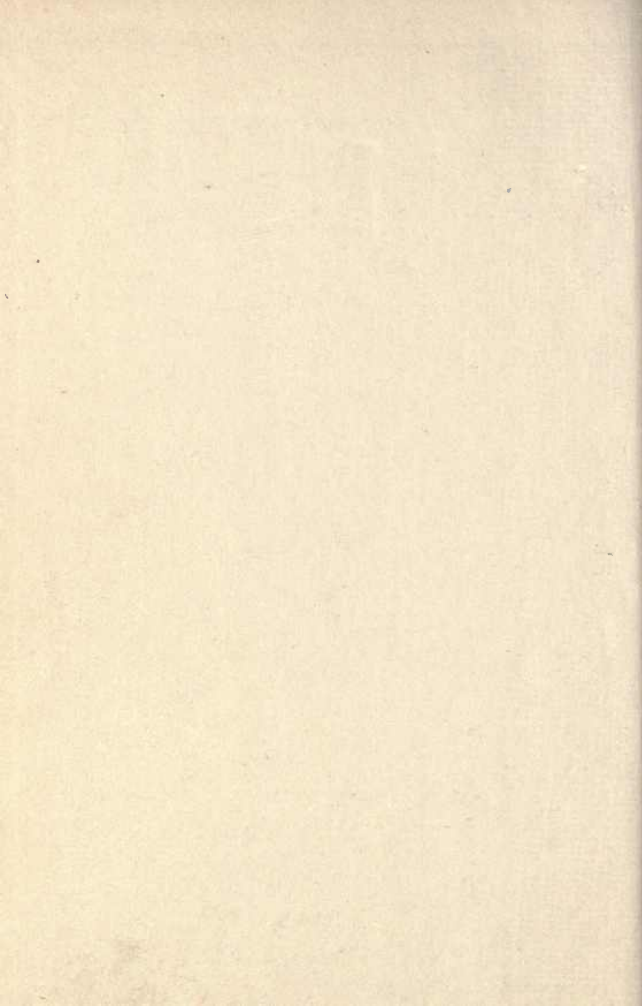
Ruggles came in, and his steps in the soft carpet made no sound; and he looked at the pair long and tenderly before he spoke. They sat there before him like children, holding hands.

Letty Lane's hat lay on the floor. Her hair was a halo around her pale, charming face; she had caught youth from the boy, she was laughing like a girl—they were making plans. And

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as the subject was Love, and there was no money in the question, and as there was sacrifice on the part of each, it is safe to think that old Dan Blair's son was planning to purchase those things that stay above ground and persist in the hearts of us all.

THE END



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